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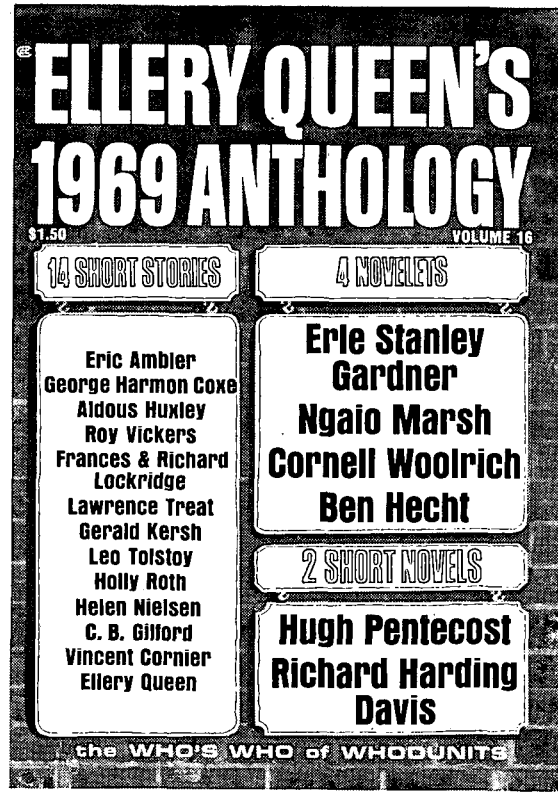

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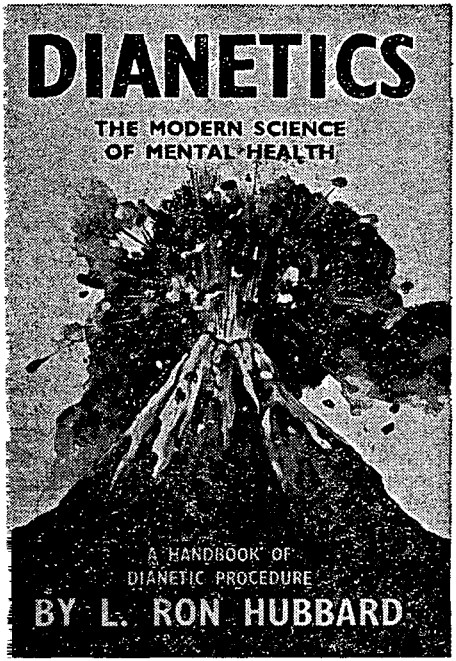

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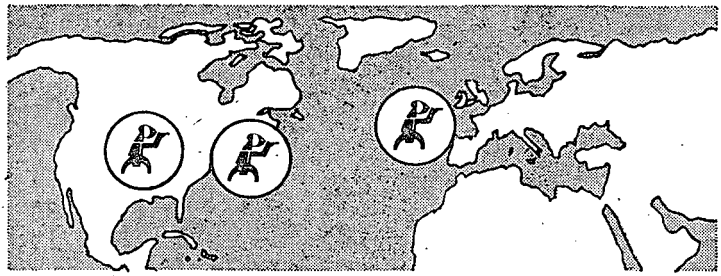

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STANLEY ELLIN's

annual *NEW* story for *EQMM*

Picture of a rich American tourist in Paris on a hot-day, on his way to the Flea Market: flashy Hawaiian sports shirt, no jacket, camera, camera bag slung around the neck, big cigar in his mouth—"the complete American tourist with the cute little wife on his arm" . . .

COIN OF THE REALM

by STANLEY ELLIN

AMONG OTHER THINGS HE HAD learned over the years to wait patiently while his wife made herself ready to go out with him, and under no conditions to distract her from the job being done before the dressing-table mirror. So now he waited patiently at the open window of the hotel room, abstractedly looking down at what seemed to be most of the motor traffic of Paris jammed into the narrow rue Cambon below.

"Walt," Millie said, "I'm ready. Walt, did you hear me? I said I was ready."

He turned to face her and saw she was indeed gleamingly, flawlessly ready, wearing that simple little black number which, to his surprise, had cost him $200. She looked fine in it. Just fine. At 46, Millie was as trim and slim as she had been on her wedding day, and a lot more chic.

"You look like a million," he said, soberly nodding his approval.

Her own expression, as she eyed him from head to foot, was anything but approving.

"I wish I could say the same for you. Is that how you expect to go out? That ridiculous Hawaiian shirt and not even a jacket?"

"It's too hot for a jacket. And we're only going to the Flea Market, for Pete's sake, not the opera."

"Even so. And that camera and that great big camera bag slung around your neck. And that awful cigar shoved into your mouth. Do you know what you look like?"

"What?"

"An American tourist, that's what. A real corny American tourist."

© *1968 by Stanley Ellin.*

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Walt glanced at the beefy, red-faced, bald-headed image of himself in the full-length mirror on the closet door and unsuccessfully tried to suck in the roll of fat overhanging his belt buckle. No question about it, Millie had spoken the truth, but that was all right with him. Even better than all right.

"I am an American tourist," he protested mildly. "Nothing wrong with letting people know it, is there?"

"Oh, yes, there is. You don't go around like this back home, so there's no reason to go around here like some good-natured hick from the sticks. You can look very impressive when you want to."

"Sure, I can. That's how I get the girls." He gave her a broad, comic wink and was disconcerted when she refused to smile in response. In fact, she was looking downright sullen. She was building up to a real storm, Walt thought uneasily—she had been since breakfast.

"Come on, hon," he said placatingly, "something's eating you, isn't it? What is it?"

"Nothing's eating me."

"Don't hand me that. I'll bet you're still bushed from the plane ride yesterday, aren't you? You know what? If you want to stay here and rest while I tend to this Flea Market expedition by myself—"

"I will not!" Millie's nostrils flared. "And it's some expedition, all right. Hunting up old coins for Ed Lynch's precious collection. We've got three little days in Paris for our whole vacation, and he has the gall—"

So that was it.

"Now, let's leave old Ed out of this," Walt said.

"I wish we could." Millie shook her head ruefully. "Walt, you don't know how much I wish you'd remember you're Ed Lynch's partner, not his errand boy. You hardly ever get away with me like this—a few days in Paris two years ago, a few days in Naples the year before that—but any time you do, there's good old Ed handing you that shopping list for his stupid coin collection."

"Millie, if the man asks me to do him a little favor, I can't turn him down, can I?"

"Why not? And I'm sure he didn't ask any favor, he told you to do it. He just has no manners at all. The way he is, he should have been some kind of gangster, not a businessman."

"Now, Millie—"

"I don't care. All I know is I wish you were partners with any body else in the whole world but good old Ed."

"Well, I'm not!"

It burst out of him so explosively that Millie gaped at him in astonishment. Then her face crumpled woefully. Quickly Walt crossed the room to her, drew her down to sit beside him on the edge of the bed.

"Ah, come on, hon," he said. "I'm

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sorry. You know I am, don't you?"

She sniffled a couple of times but managed to hold back the tears. "Maybe."

"No maybes about it. But please be reasonable, Millie. Face the facts. You know everything we've got—and we've got plenty—is only because Ed took me into the plant twenty years ago and taught me the engraving and printing business from A to Z. It doesn't matter how much of a roughneck he is, just look at our balance sheet. A fine home in Scarsdale, a big summer place on the Cape, two cars, a new mink whenever you feel like it—As far as that goes, do you know how much your daughter's wedding cost us."

"She's your daughter, too. And what difference does it make how much it cost? That doesn't make Ed Lynch any easier to tolerate."

"Twenty thousand dollars, Millie. Twenty thousand in cash. And because of Ed I could sign checks for a dozen weddings like that and never feel it. That's what you have to keep in mind."

She shook her head stubbornly. "You've got a lot of ability. You always did. You could have done just as well with somebody else."

"Done what?" Walt demanded. "I hate to bring up ancient history, but what the hell was I fitted for when I got done winning World War Number Two for the OSS? Superspy, that was me. Some qualifications to offer the boys running the rat-race. A thirty-year-old superspy who could get along in a few foreign languages nobody wanted to hear him talk anyhow. But with enough sense to know that when everyone else in the world is swimming in money he's not going to be any ragpicker. That's where Ed came into the picture, Millie, and one thing you have to admit about him. He didn't just talk big money, he delivered it."

"All right, but please don't get so excited. You know it's bad for you."

"I am not excited. I am only trying to settle this between us once and for all. Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I say it's not a wife's place to mix into her husband's business. I hate to tell you how many times I've seen trouble between partners just because of that. Ed and I are partners, that's how it is, and there's no use talking about it any more. Is that all right with you?"

Millie shrugged ungraciously.

"Nothing to say?" Walt asked.

"No. Except sometimes I wonder if you aren't more married to Ed Lynch than to me."

"Hardly. But come to think of it—" Walt playfully nudged his wife with his elbow "—it might be tougher getting a divorce from him than from you."

"Well, you're not getting any from me, if that's what you've got on your mind," Millie retorted, and Walt saw with relief that she had decided to forgive him.

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He wasted no more time—he got up and helped her to her feet.

"Ready to do some shopping then?" he asked.

"You know I always am," said Millie pertly.

Outside the hotel the doorman asked if he should call a cab for them, but Walt said no, and led the way to the Metro station on the Place de la Concorde.

"The subway?" Millie said in surprise at the head of the stairway.

"Why not? I thought you might like to see how the other half lives for a change."

She gave him a look for that but went along amiably, and, it was plain, thoroughly enjoyed the ride. Her tantrum over, the storm clouds quickly blown away, she was the old Millie again, taking pleasure in something simply because she was sharing it with him, just glad to be with him, her arm tight through his. Married almost 25 years, he thought, but when it came to him she was still like a schoolkid on her first date. That was all right with him—highly gratifying, in fact—but it did raise problems now and then. For instance, it made it just about impossible to tell her that sometimes when they were on these trips abroad he would have preferred to be by himself, away from her company.

Ed Lynch had disagreed with his feeling about it, had insisted that having Millie tagging along with him almost every step of the way was the perfect final touch. The complete American tourist with the cute little wife on his arm chattering to him. But that was Ed for you. A cold-blooded specimen, divorced three times and now on the verge of the fourth, he didn't know what marriage to someone like Millie could mean. For Ed it was always some pinup girl, as hard-bitten as he was. No wonder Millie hated him and his succession of wives like poison.

At Marcadet-Poissionniers station Walt steered the way through the iron-fenced maze of the transfer point to the train going to Clignancourt at the end of the line. There he and Millie ascended the stairs into the golden, summertime sunlight of Paris and crossed the boulevard to the Flea Market.

They were caught up in a crowd as they entered the market grounds. Tourists with Americans predominating, French family parties, young couples dreamily strolling, arms around each other's waist, as if taking a moonlight walk beside the Seine, but all with an eye out for a bargain. And from what Walt could see as he and Millie were carried along by the throng, there was certainly the stuff here to suit the weirdest tastes.

The market was an endless congeries of roadways and alleyways lined with rickety shacks and stands which displayed every conceivable kind of second-hand goods from rusty paper clips to the stripped-

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down chassis of a once magnificent limousine. There was an almost insane quality to the variety of merchandise, Walt discovered. At one point, while Millie stopped to admire a shabby Tiffany lamp hanging over the doorway of one of the shacks, he found himself looking through a shoebox full of browned, water-stained, beautifully engraved party invitations issued by various members of the Nineteenth Century French nobility to each other. It was the engraving that caught his professional eye; it was the kind of meticulous craftsmanship devoted to lettering that was so hard to duplicate today; and it was only on second thought that he wondered who would possibly be interested in buying a collection of decaying party invitations.

Offhand, it would have seemed impossible to find the way to any particular location in that bewildering complex, but Ed Lynch had provided careful directions to the one dealer he had assured Millie she should do business with, and they located the place without too much trouble. Millie had been on the verge of buying the Louis Quatorze escritoire she had long yearned for at the antique shop she frequented on Third Avenue in Manhattan, and it had been Ed who had talked her out of the idea. Bullied her out of it, really. If she and Walt were hopping to Paris for a long week-end, he pointed out, they must make the trip pay off by going to this antique furniture dealer in the Flea Market who, so Ed had heard, gave real value for your money. And, of course, while they were at the Flea Market it would be no trouble for Walt to hunt up some rare coins that Ed wanted for his collection. Trust Ed to plan everything so neatly, like a chess master looking six moves ahead.

But the resentful mood that Millie had been plunged into when she saw through Ed's game was gone now as she wandered among the collection of furniture in the shop, her eyes bright with greed. The proprietor of the shop was a brisk, helpful young woman, as quick and hungry as a piranha. She was so insistently helpful, in fact, that Millie had to draw her husband out of doors to have a private word with him.

"What's our limit?" she asked.

"I guess it depends. Did you see what you want?"

"Yes, there's a couple of stunning pieces to pick from. But I have a feeling she'll ask a fortune for either one of them. I'd like to know how much bargaining I have to do."

"From what Ed said, all you can. Remember he told you to go over every inch of the piece and make sure you're not getting stuck. And not to look like you're interested in buying, whatever you do."

"Can I go as high as five hundred dollars?"

"If you think it's worth it. Just

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take your time before you sign anything."

"But what about you?" Millie said as he had been sure she would. "You know how itchy you get standing around while I shop."

"I don't have to. I can look around for Ed's coins meanwhile. You can wait for me here. I won't be gone long anyhow."

He left, thankful that she always preferred having him out from underfoot while she was at her haggling, and drifted along the rutted, stony, dirt-surfaced roadway, taking no heed of the crowd of bargain hunters going their way around him, his eyes fixed on the signs marking the owners of the stands he passed. Brument, Fermanter, Duras, Puel, Schmitt, Bayle, Mazel, Piron. Battered furniture, from rusty café chairs to gigantic chests of drawers, seemed to be the stock in trade of all these tradesmen except the last one. While a few articles of furniture could be glimpsed through the open door of C. Piron's ramshackle premises, outside his shanty, instead of a display of the best he had to offer, were only some cartons containing broken bottles. Wine and beer bottles, Walt saw when he went over to take a closer look at them, not one of them undamaged. It made as unappetizing a display as he had seen anywhere in the market.

A man emerged from the shanty and leaned against its doorway to watch Walt make his inspection. Cadaverously thin, hard-featured, cold-eyed, he folded his arms on his chest and stood there in indifferent silence.

Walt turned to him and pointed at the tattered cardboard sign tacked to the wall of the shanty. "Piron?" he asked.

The man admitted to this by an almost imperceptible nod.

"I'm looking for a place to buy some coins," Walt said. "Rare coins. I wondered if you could help me."

"*Je ne comprends pas,*" the man said. "Don't understand. Don't speak English."

"Oh, in that case," Walt said amiably, and repeated the words in fluent French.

The man's eyes widened in surprise, then were veiled again.

"Coins" he said. "What kind?"

"American pennies. Old ones. The ones with the Indian head on them."

"What years?"

"1903 and 1904."

"And?"

"And 1906."

"Three, four, six—that's the magic numbers, all right," Piron said. "So you're the one."

"Yes."

"And Mercier got my message through to you, I see. But I thought he'd be bringing back the answer himself."

"No, he's only in charge of distribution around here. I handle the complaints."

"So you had to come all the way

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from America just to handle mine." The man looked Walt over and smiled broadly, showing a mouthful of gold fillings. "Beautiful," he said. "Just beautiful. Who'd ever suspect it? The way you're made up you look like the biggest innocent to ever hit town. You could walk off with the Louvre under your arm, and the cops wouldn't even give you a second look."

Walt motioned at the throng eddying by. "Do we have to talk about it out here?"

"You're right." Piron gestured him into the shanty, closed the door behind them, and slid its bolt into place. With no window to admit the light, the room was bleakly lit by a single flickering kerosene lamp. Its furnishings, Walt saw, consisted of an old kitchen table and chair, its stock was a few monstrously oversized cabinets, highboys, and armoires ranged around the walls.

"We've got all the privacy we need here," Piron assured him. "Hardly anybody seems to be in the market for broken bottles."

"Very smart."

"It is, if I say so myself. And those pieces of junk you're looking at are all so damn big you'd have to buy a cathedral to put them in. No, you don't have to worry about any customers popping in here while we settle our business. All you have to worry about is making me happy. And you can start by sitting down at that table there and keeping your hands on it."

The man was standing behind him. Walt gingerly turned his head and saw the malevolent-looking little automatic leveled at his back.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"What do you think?" retorted Piron. "After what happened a couple of years ago to the guy who operated over in the Belleville district, I take no chances. I also heard something unpleasant happened to that poor stiff in Naples who got out of line before that. So you sit quiet and don't do anything to make me nervous. If you even want to blow your nose, ask me first."

Walt sat down at the table and rested his hands on it, palms down. He leaned back to give the camera and its accessory case clearance. "You seem to know a lot of things that aren't strictly your business," he said. "I suppose that's what it comes to. We pay, or you sing to the cops."

Piron stood a few feet away from the table, the gun steady in his hand. "That's what it comes to."

"And what do you sing about?" Walt inquired placidly. "A couple of crooks being bumped off? Who would you finger for those jobs? Mercier? I guarantee he's got an alibi for both of them that would make you look silly."

"Sure he has. But maybe I know a lot more about your whole operation than just what happened to those two stiffs. Do I look like the kind of idiot who'd try to put the squeeze on you unless I did?"

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"You're bluffing. It's a nice try, but it's only a bluff."

"The hell it is. You want to hear how much I know?"

"If you put that gun away. It's hard to concentrate with a gun shoved in your face."

"That's too bad," Piron said with venom, "but it took me a lot of trouble to get this story together, and I'd hate to be interrupted while I'm telling it. After it's over you can judge just what you're up against and what kind of deal you'll have to make."

"I still say you're bluffing."

"Am I? Then listen to this. For one thing, your stuff is being turned out in some plant in America. A big classy print shop. And you've got a first-class engraver stashed away there doing the plates, a real genius who used to turn out counterfeit for the military during the war that they dumped in Germany and Italy. The records say he's been dead for twenty years, but you and I know better, don't we? We know that fancy print shop is just a front for the jobs he's still turning out in the back room, don't we?"

Walt shrugged. "It's your story," he said.

"And a good one, too, isn't it? Maybe worth plenty more than you figured on paying when you walked in here. Because I also happen to know you're too smart to turn out American counterfeit and stir up trouble at home. No, all these years it's strictly franc notes, and lire, and deutschmarks, and maybe pesetas and pounds, too, all shipped inside those pretty bookbinding jobs to dealers like Mercier here, and the one in Naples, and another one in Berlin, and so on all over the place. And they turn over the stuff to small-timers like me to get rid of at thirty percent of the face value of which I can keep a lousy five percent. Five percent," Piron said with scathing contempt, "and for taking all the risks. Well, it's not enough. That's what I told Mercier and what I'm telling you now. When you know as much as I do you don't rate as a small-timer any more, and you don't have to settle for small-time pay!"

"What kind of pay did you have in mind?" Walt said.

"Oho!" Piron leered at him in golden-toothed triumph. "So you're singing a different tune now. That's a good joke, all right. You sing sweet or I sing sour."

"You're wasting time. Get to the point."

"I will. I don't like these commission deals where I only get my cut from the stuff I peddle. That means when things are slow I could starve to death here. I want some cash, too. Whenever Mercier hands me a bundle of the stuff I want him to stick a wad of real money in my fist. A big wad."

"How big"

"Let's do it this way," Piron said coldly. "You name me a figure, and I'll tell you if it makes me happy."

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Walt shrugged. "I'll do better than that. I'll make the first payment myself right now. But you'll have to put that gun away. You ought to know you're not scaring me with it. You're not really so stupid you'd want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"And you can't be sure of that until you've tried me out," jeered Piron, the gun remaining fixed on its target. "Now let's see your money. And it better be government issue, too, none of your pretty art works."

"If that's the way you want to do it," said Walt. He slowly stood up, apparently oblivious of the menacing gun, and pressed the catch of the bulky leather case resting against the roundness of his belly.

"Hold it!" snarled Piron. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"The money's in here."

"I'll see for myself. Just stick that thing on the table."

Walt unslung the case from around his neck and placed it on the table. Piron approached it as warily as if it might blow up in his face. He prodded its cover back, his eyes never leaving Walt, and lifted out a sizeable roll of franc notes bound with a heavy rubber band. He hefted the roll.

"Not bad," he said. "Not bad at all. How much is it?"

"You'll find out when you count it," Walt said. "But one thing has to be understood. This is what you're on the payroll for from now on, and it's what Mercier will have ready for you when you report to him. But try to put the bite on us for more, and you'll be in real trouble."

"And you know what real trouble is, don't you?" gibed Piron.

"Don't strain yourself being funny. Is it a deal?"

"If this is real money. You can pay off some pigeon in counterfeit, not me."

"All right," Walt said impatiently, "take a look at it. Hold it up to the light and see for yourself."

Piron thrust his gun into his pocket, unsnapped the rubber band from the roll of banknotes, and selected one from the middle of the roll. He held it up to the uncertain light of the kerosene lamp, stretching it tight between his fingers, examining it with the eye of experience.

He had time for only one choked cry when the leather strap of the carrying case was snapped around his neck in a garrote. His hands flailed the air wildly as Walt, leaning back against the edge of the table, a knee planted solidly in the small of the man's back, drew the garrote steadily tighter.

Piron's body arched against the restraining knee until it seemed his spine must crack. The only sound in the room was a strangled wheezing in his chest which finally dwindled into total silence. When Walt released his grip on the garrote, the

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lifeless body sagged to the floor and lay face up, features distorted and sightless eyes glaring at the ceiling.

Any of the armoires in the place had room in it to store a body with twice Piron's heft. With unflurried efficiency Walt unlocked one, placed Piron's remains in it, and locked it. Carefully he polished its massive key with his handkerchief; then, using the handkerchief as a sling, he tossed the key on top of a highboy in a far corner of the shanty where it landed with a metallic clatter.

That chore attended to, he polished the table top with the handkerchief, reclaimed the banknote from the floor where it had fluttered from Piron's hand, replaced it in the roll of banknotes which he thrust into his pocket. He slung the camera case around his neck and looked the room over to make sure everything was in order. Satisfied it was, he doused the kerosene lamp, slid back the bolt on the door with his elbow, casually walked out of the shanty, and swung the door shut behind him with another thrust of the elbow. Then he joined the crowd in the teeming, sunlit roadway and moved along at its tempo, taking in the sights around him with bland interest.

Millie was still at her haggling in the furniture mart when he got back to it. He could see her inside, volubly addressing its proprietor, and he patiently waited outside the place until she appeared before him, her face glowing.

"It's stunning," she told him eagerly. "It's rosewood and only six hundred dollars and that includes shipping. Walt, you don't mind if it costs a little more than we figured, do you?"

"Not if it's what you want," Walt said.

"You're an angel," Millie said. "You really are." Then she remembered. "What about you? Did you find those coins Ed wanted? Those old pennies?"

"I did. Took care of the deal just the way I was supposed to."

"Old faithful," Millie said teasingly. She squeezed his hand. "But oh, Walt, you really should have seen me take care of that biddy inside. Believe it or not, she started off by asking a thousand!"

"A thousand? Say, that's pretty steep."

"Well, it was your fault," Millie said accusingly. "I'll guarantee she took one good look at you and decided, well, here's some more of those stupid tourists who'll fall for anybody's hard luck story."

"I guess she did," said Walt, apologetically.

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a *NEW* detective *NOVELET* by

CHRISTIANNA BRAND

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POISON IN THE CUP

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

THE GIRL MUST HAVE BEEN LEANing with her full weight against the door for when Stella opened it the girl almost fell into the hall. She said, "I've taken an overdose of morphine."

Panic rose in Stella's breast. What did one do? What were the proper steps to take? A doctor's wife for fifteen years and still she didn't know; she had closed her mind to it, she had loathed it all so much—the dreary people with their sicknesses and miseries trailing up her garden path, taking up the two best rooms on the ground floor.

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Stella dragged the girl into the surgery, heaved her into the one armchair. "My husband's out." But she could telephone Frederick. "I'll get his associate," she said.

The girl lay with closed eyes in the big chair—a small, ginger-haired creature with leaden eyelids and a lax pink mouth. Her legs, sprawled before her, were exquisitely shaped and yet unattractively too large for her small body. The tiny, rather grubby little hands lay slackly in her lap. Was she already sliding into coma? Ought one to be wasting time on telephone calls? Ought one not to be administering an emetic, an antidote?

Frederick was not in. Stella crashed back the receiver in despair. The hospital!—she ought to have thought of ringing the hospital first. Only for heavens' sake what was the damn number? And she groped blindly for the directory, one anxious eye on the girl, thinking: I don't even know the number of my husband's own hospital!

And so she observed the small hand, surreptitiously moving, surreptitiously drawing up a stocking, pulled askew no doubt by her stumbling passage across the hall and now cutting uncomfortably across her plump thigh. And all of a sudden she knew. She said, "You're that girl Kelly from the hospital!"

The girl opened her eyes and gave her a small, sweet, sly smile. She said, "I suppose you're his wife?" Her voice was a little dying-away murmur.

Stella left the telephone and came and stood over her. "And you haven't taken morphine at all—*have* you? This is all a put-up drama. You've come merely to make a scene."

The girl smiled again, that sly, faintly mocking, secret smile.

Stella caught at her arm, jerking the lolling figure upright. "There's no use giving *me* enigmatic glances, my dear. I'm not a man, I'm not impressed. You haven't taken morphine or anything else and you can now get up and trot right back to the hospital." She gave the soft slack arm another jerk. "Come on—get out!"

The girl dragged her arm free and lay back in the chair again, looking up spitefully from under her pale reddish eyebrows. She said, "What will Richard say?" and added in her silly, faint, dying-away voice, "You know the two of us are in love?"

"I know you've been pursuing him round the hospital ever since you came there," said Stella. "But all doctors get that kind of thing and I'm sorry to disillusion you, but you've been nothing to Ricky but a bloody bore. All these ringings-up in phony voices, all these sloppy little notes . . . My dear girl, my husband is twenty years older than you are, he's married, he's a very busy man—why, he hardly knows you exist."

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The girl had been leaning back in the chair listening quietly. Now she opened her eyes. She said, "Of course you'd be the last one to know, wouldn't you?"—and closed her eyes again.

It was all no use—the girl was just a silly, obstinate, hysterical little bitch, trying to make herself interesting. Stella lost patience. "All right, have it your own way, but now I'm bored with you, as bored as Richard is. Kindly get up and get out of my house."

The girl said in her dying-away voice which yet was half-mockingly triumphant, "But I'm going to have a baby," and pulled aside the cheap little tarty coat for a moment, then softly folded it over her body again.

Stella sat down on the edge of the examining table and for a moment gave herself over to a sick despair. For what a muddle, what a sordid, endless, damaging muddle this dreadful little creature might land them all in, just to satisfy her craving for attention. A doctor . . . And the wretched girl had been, in a way, his patient; he had attended her for a couple of days at the hospital for an infected finger—that was, in fact, how all this nonsense had begun. But if she'd been his patient, then that meant the attentive interest of the General Medical Council. And the girl was undeniably pregnant.

A physical nausea rose up in Stella at the thought of the gossip to come, the leering eyes and the whispering tongues, the goggling excitement of the hospital staff, the no-smoke-without-fire routine; the ceaseless threat from the girl herself of scenes and collapses and recurrent fake suicide. Marriage to Ricky had been dull enough in all conscience; but now how precious it began to seem in its monotonous security. For what if patients began to fall off?—if poverty and struggle came again, as in the old days of their building up of the practice?—back to the dreary round of night calls and canceled parties and always-arriving-late . . .

I couldn't face it, Stella thought; I just couldn't go back to the scraping and saving, the petty economies, the cheeky tradesmen, the little, niggling, mounting debts. But if this girl persisted in this charge of hers—

There was a step in the hall and Frederick Graham, Ricky's associate, came into the surgery.

Ricky would have stood for a moment, rather helpless, hesitant, diffident; but Frederick, the debonair, the self-assured, just lifted a devil's eyebrow and said with his easy smile that he was sorry, he hadn't realized there was anyone here—

If this stupid little bitch had had to fasten on one of them, why couldn't it have been Frederick?—who, after all, was ten times more glamorous, surely, than poor, self-effacing, quiet Richard. Frederick

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was a bachelor and consequently far less susceptible to this kind of blackmail. And yet—

After all, he *was* a bachelor; and in that case—

Like a sick thrust into her heart came the knowledge that she couldn't have borne that—the thought of Frederick in the arms of this creamy-soft, sleechy-soft little creature. For many months now, when the humdrum of life with Richard had become too much to bear, she had titillated herself by pretending that she and Frederick . . . The truth is, she thought, that I'm no better than this miserable little strumpet here! But at least she had made no scenes, played out no dramas—Frederick had no idea of her day dreams.

The girl in the chair opened her eyes and gazed up starrily at Frederick. "I know you! You're Dr. Graham." Then she added in a silly, baby voice, "I'm Ann."

Frederick drew his brows together in one of his quick, black frowns. "It's Nurse Kelly from the hospital, isn't it? What's she doing here?" But the truth began to dawn. He said, "Not still chasing after Ricky, are you?"

"They are going to have a darling little baby," said Stella.

"Oh, for heavens' sake!"

"—and she's taken an overdose of morphine. Can you imagine?"

He flicked the girl over with a sharp, professional eye. "Morphine? How long ago?"

"Before I left the hospital," said Ann Kelly defiantly.

"She's been here fifteen minutes or so," said Stella. "In such a state of coma when she arrived that I had to half carry her in. So I suppose that would tally." She added with triumphant sarcasm that under the circumstances the girl's present state of liveliness was interesting, wasn't it?

"Liveliness is a symptom in the initial stages," said the girl, temporarily reviving to defend herself.

"Not by the hour, my dear—even I know that. And you've forgotten to be dry and thirsty."

"*And* to have pinpoint pupils," said Frederick, bending forward and lifting an eyelid before she could prevent him. He straightened. "Now then, what's all this nonsense about?"

The girl slowly opened her coat again, then folded it about her. "Richard Harrison's the father," she said. She rolled her head toward Stella. "Naturally, *she* won't believe it."

"Neither will anyone else," said Frederick; but with the threat about the drug allayed he had time to consider—Stella saw the quick frown, the tiny shock, the immediate acceptance of all that this might yet mean to them—to herself and Richard, to himself, to the practice.

"I shall have to try to convince them, won't I?" said the soft little voice.

And then Ricky was there, stand-

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ing in the doorway with his doubtful look, his self-deprecating air, that sense of quietness and simplicity. "What on earth—? Good Lord, what's *she* doing here?"

"Oh, Richard!" sighed Ann Kelly, and toppled forward out of the chair and lay at his feet.

Stella lost her temper. "Oh, my God—the play-acting little bitch!" As the two men stooped to raise the girl, she thrust them aside. "Leave her alone! There's nothing wrong with her—the last time she did this I could see her surreptitiously pulling up her stockings. She's no more fainted than I have."

And Stella added viciously, shrilly, that if only the little fool knew how awful she looked, with her skirt all rucked up and her legs at silly angles, she'd get up of her own accord and not continue to present to her dear Richard so unlovely a display of not very clean underclothes. As the girl, sure enough, began to try to struggle back to the chair, Stella explained, "She's come here with some drama about having taken a lethal dose of morphine, and you are the father of her chee-ild."

"Oh, my God!" said Ricky as if he could stand not one moment more of it.

"Never mind, Ricky, it's all a damn bore but it's no worse than that. She's got into a jam and the only way she can see out is to make herself into an interesting little martyr. Just take no notice."

"We'll see about that," said the girl.

Ricky stood looking down at her wretchedly. "Surely you don't want to ruin me?"

"If I'm to be dragged through the mud," said the girl, "I want to know you're there with me."

"There'll *be* no mud, if only you won't be foolish."

"But I want mud," said the girl. "I revel in mud. And I want to see you wallowing in it, you and her too—not to hurt you, I didn't really mean to hurt *you*; but she—she's been so very clever and managing this evening, seeing through all my poor little defenses, so sure of herself, sneering at me, mocking me—let *her* wallow, let her suffer and if you have to, well, I can't help that. Because I have the whip hand you see, haven't I? And I'll use it, believe me—I'll pay her back for every taunt and every sneer."

Exhausted with spite she leaned back in the chair again and closed her eyes; and on her lips was that sweet little, evil little smile.

Ricky disregarded this outburst. He stood looking down at her dispassionately—in fact, thought Stella, irritated, almost with pity. He said, "You haven't really taken morphine, have you?"

"I have—enough to kill me. Before I left the hospital. I took it from the poison cabinet on B Ward. You can ring up and ask them, if you like. I left a note saying I'd stolen it."

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"And telling them why?" Frederick asked, deliberately casual.

"Of course not. I woldn't let you down," she said to Ricky, fluttering her eyelids. "*No* one knows." But she added with an evil look at Stella, "Not yet."

Ricky leaned forward, as Frederick had done, put a hand on her wrist, lifted her lip with a thumb to observe the moist gums and tongue, pulled down an eyelid. She wriggled and smirked beneath his touch but he might have been a veterinarian examining a doubtful sheep or cow. "Well, you definitely have not taken anything." To Stella he said, "I must go. I only dropped in for a smoke and a cup of tea between my patient's labor pains. She'd better be got back to the hospital, but give her something first—a cup of something hot, coffee would be best, strong and black and plenty of sugar." He hesitated. "Freddie, would you mind seeing her back?"

"No, of course not. I think someone should make sure she's up to no tricks."

Frederick seeing her back to the hospital . . . Leading her in, the heroine, pathetic or triumphant as best suited her; staging collapses, noisy outbursts about cruel Mrs. Harrison, yelling her little head off about Richard getting her into trouble, giving her a baby . . .

Angrily boiling up the kettle in the kitchen, Stella thought with black despair that peace of mind was gone forever—nothing, nothing would stop this girl. If one act failed, another would take its place; they would find her hanging about their door, besieging the houses of patients or friends, following Ricky about the hospital, making scenes in the wards. The head nurse would finally bundle her off no doubt, but by that time the damage would be done. No use to plead, to appeal, to threaten, to command—the girl was lost to shame, beyond control; having nothing to lose, she was in the strongest position of all.

I wish to God she *had* taken morphine, thought Stella, pouring boiling water over the heaped coffee in the jug. Much *I'd* have done to bring her back to life! For two pins I'd give her the damn dose myself! And straight on this thought, positive determination, born complete and mature from the womb of necessity, came the knowledge of what she must do. Her heart reeled, her hands became instantly clammy and cold; but without hesitation or remorse she recognized what had to be. Ann Kelly had told all the world that she had taken an overdose of morphine, that she wanted to die. Well, so she would.

A curtain descended between two distinct halves of Stella's mind—the half that felt and the half that acted. All so easy, all so safe, so obvious. The note to the hospital authorities would be produced at

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the inquest; if morphine proved not to be missing from the hospital, it would be assumed that she got it in some other way. The girl was hysterical, unbalanced, an exhibitionist; and in the family way. One more suicide by one more pathetic, desperate sinner—and no one, she had said, had yet been told the story of Richard Harrison being the father of the child . . .

Cool, decisive, without further reflection, Stella walked through to the surgery. "Ricky, I think you'd better take her into the drawing room. We don't want anyone to come in and find her here." She gave the two men no time to argue but hustled them, half dragging the girl, to the other room. "Sit her down on the sofa. The coffee won't be a minute." She closed the drawing-room door behind her, and swiftly unlocking a cabinet in the surgery, took out the bottle of morphine tablets.

How many? She emptied half a dozen of the tiny pills into her hand, put back the bottle, locked the cabinet, replaced the key. Back in the kitchen she gave herself not a moment to reconsider; she dropped the tablets into the cup, poured on the coffee hot and strong, stirred in abundant sugar, then walked to the drawing room and thrust it under the girl's nose. "Come on, drink it."

The girl pushed the cup aside. "I don't want it."

"Drink it!" said Stella. The men looked up uneasily, half shocked by the determination in her voice. The girl took the cup and drank, sipping it slowly, till nothing but a spoonful of dregs remained.

Stella took the cup from her and went back into the kitchen. Once there, she rinsed out the cup with scalding water, carefully preserving, however, the lipstick on the rim and the girl's fingerprints and her own on the outside; she then stirred the coffee in the pot, poured out just enough of the muddy deposit, left the cup on the drain board of the sink, and went back into the drawing room. The whole thing had taken not half a minute. She said, taking care to preserve the irritable scorn of her manner, "I trust you're better now?"—and could stand aside and wonder at her own grim determination.

They all stood looking down at the girl, Frederick impatient, Ricky on the hop because he ought to have gone back to his case long ago, Stella ice-cold, remorseless, yet with a fluttering at her innermost heart. For now the other half of her mind had begun to work again, to admit the possibility of danger, the necessity to plan, to calculate. If the girl went back to the hospital, they would soon enough see that she had indeed taken morphine and would deal with her accordingly. And to have her life saved now would make matters a hundredfold worse than they had been before; for the girl, conscious of no

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genuine attempt to administer poison to herself, would become aware that someone else had done it for her.

And then what a story she would have to relate!—confirmed by the fact that no morphine would in fact be missing from the hospital. Or if she kept silent, it would appear after all a genuine attempt at suicide—since in view of her condition the dose would be diagnosed as a lethal one—and far more credence would then be given to any story she chose to tell. No; the first step had been taken. I am a murderer, thought Stella, a murderer—and from the very first step of my murder I am committed. I can't turn back.

She made another sudden resolution. She drew the two men away and into the dining-room end. "Do you think we're wise, after all, to let her go straight back to the hospital? Wouldn't it be better to keep her here for the night? I could ring up and make it all right—tell them some tarradiddle. In the morning the girl will be more rational, and we can talk some sense into her. I can make up the bed in the spare room and we can let her sleep it off."

"I believe you may be right," said Frederick. "Only in that case it's a pity we gave her black coffee." He glanced toward the sofa. "She seems to be considerably awakened already." (This must be the first signs, the restless voluble symptoms before the coma set in; time was growing short.)

Ricky glanced for the hundredth time at his watch. "I simply must go. Yes, I think that *is* best, Stella. Everything always looks clearer by daylight and I'll speak to the head nurse myself and sort it out with her. She's a good soul." He turned back to the lolling figure on the sofa. "Look here, my wife thinks you'd better stay for the night and then we can talk things over in the morning, more calmly. It's a pity you had the coffee but I'll give you something to counteract that and you can have a good sleep; then you'll feel better."

He gave her no time to argue but went to the surgery and returned with half a dozen small white pills. "Give her these, Stella, with a drop of warm milk." He rolled them out of his cupped hand onto the high mantelpiece.

"Six?" said Frederick, looking at them a bit doubtfully.

"It's only that Restuwell stuff; they're quite mild and she's had all that coffee. Now I *must* rush." He gave not a backward glance at the girl but hurried off out of the door. They heard the car engine purr into life outside.

"They'll think it very peculiar, won't they?" said the cool sweet voice from the sofa, "you keeping me here for the night. I suppose they'll think Mrs. Harrison didn't want it to come out about my trying to commit suicide because I was

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having a baby by her husband: and gave me antidotes and things and kept me here till I was all right again."

"An impression you would do nothing to correct, would you?" said Frederick, savagely sardonic.

"Of course not," said Ann Kelly, smiling her little smile.

Suddenly Stella's self-control fell away from her, as though her clothes had ripped apart and fallen, leaving her naked. "You vile, filthy, lying, blackmailing utter little bitch!" She stood over the girl, shaking dreadfully, one hand clenched as though she would hit out at her. Frederick caught her shoulder and pulled her away and she collapsed against him, lying convulsed with great, shuddering sobs, against his breast.

"Oh, Frederick! Oh, my God, it's all so terrifying, so horrible!" Terrifying and horrible to have this cool, smiling, taunting little face lifted to hers like an evil white flower; to know that soon it would smile its sneering little smile no more; to be unmoved by that knowledge, to know oneself suddenly not human any longer, not capable of ordinary human pity or remorse.

Frederick held her close; his clasp was strong, reassuring, kind. "Hush, my dear, don't upset yourself, don't let it get you down! You've been marvelous, love, you've handled the whole thing perfectly, and you'll see, it will all be right in the morning." He held her away from him, pulled out a handkerchief, dabbed at her tear-stained face. "Come on, dry up those lovely blue eyes of yours; it isn't as bad as all that."

She leaned her head for a moment, just for a moment, against the firm, kind shoulder, reveling uncontrollably in her first physical contact with him, drowned for a moment in this first revelation of his tenderness. "Oh, Frederick!"

"Oh, Frederick!" mimicked the soft sneering voice.

They moved apart sharply, as though a sword had been cleft between them. Stella cast one venomous glance at the sofa and went out of the room. "I'll phone the hospital."

The head nurse seemed only mildly surprised to learn that Ann Kelly was at Dr. Harrison's house. "Has there been any excitement at the hospital?" asked Stella. "She says she left a note saying she'd taken some morphine—"

"Yes, there was some rubbish of that sort. But the poisons are all accounted for and I'm getting a bit used to that young lady's tricks—not to say fed up with them. Why did she come to you?"

"Well, you know she's supposed to have a crush on my poor husband?" (Better to be casually frank.)

"They will do this kind of thing!" said the head nurse knowingly. "It hasn't prevented her go-

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ing around with one of the orderlies."

"You know she's going to have a baby?"

"Oh," said the head nurse rather flatly. She added, "Are you sure?"

"When she shows you—"

"I suppose I ought to have spotted it. Well, tomorrow I shall send that young lady packing. Him too, if I have anything to say."

"Him?"

"Well, young Bates is obviously the father. They've been very thick, and there's been nobody else."

Obviously the father! All for nothing—a murderer, and all for nothing. In this new light Stella saw that any suggestion against Ricky would have been brushed aside: the head nurse, sturdy and outspoken, would have stamped a scornful foot on the first whisper of scandal, dispatched the girl before she'd had time to make further trouble, probably extorted from the young man an admission of responsibility. All safe—all would have been harmless and clear and unsensational. And now—

Too late. If she made any move now to save the girl, Ann Kelly would be abroad with the dangerous knowledge that an attempt had been made on her life in this house. Very well, then; by her own folly and malice the girl had signed her death warrant, and execution must be carried out. She had declared, and in writing, her intention of destroying herself by this means, and nurses must have many opportunities to obtain drugs and cover up their thefts. If she were not alive to deny it, the police would accept her as a suicide. With the threat of scandal gone, there would be nothing to connect her death with anyone in the Harrison household . . .

The head nurse thought it a good idea to keep the girl overnight; in the morning she might be less hysterical and could more easily be dealt with. They hung up in mutual trust and friendliness. Once released, Stella flew to the poison book in the surgery. A ballpoint pen was kept in the book, always handy. Not daring to put on a light, she picked up the book and, turning back the pages at random, altered a figure here and there.

Ann Kelly was making a small play for handsome Dr. Graham, gazing up at him with increasingly bright eyes; her hands, thought Stella, looked like plump claws, waving as she chattered. Frederick was looking at her a little curiously. "She seems very overexcited," he said to Stella aside. "Better get her upstairs, I think." He took the six tablets from the mantelpiece. "Don't forget these."

"I don't want them," said the girl, looking at Stella like an obstinate child, the coy glance reserved for Frederick.

"Mrs. Harrison will bring you a nice hot drink—"

"I don't want any more of Mrs.

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Harrison's nice hot drinks. She'll probably put arsenic in the next one, if she hasn't already." But she saw the gathering frown, the coming together of the slanted black eyebrows. "Well, all right—for *you*, Dr. Graham," she agreed.

He dropped the pills into her hand and she swallowed them dry, one at a time, tossing back her head with each swallow. She looks like a hen drinking, thought Stella.

Frederick took her up the stairs, a hand under her elbow, but she would have no more assistance. "I don't want her fussing around me," she said, tossing her head toward Stella who was hurriedly making the bed. "If you'll leave me alone, I'll go to bed quietly, honestly I will. I'm—a bit exhausted." She clutched at a last moment of drama. "It's been rather a strain."

"Well, the bathroom's over there," said Stella. She fished a clean towel out of the linen closet and ushered the girl in. When she returned to the bedroom, Frederick was going hastily through the scruffy little handbag, dipping a hand into coat pockets.

"We can't take any chances," he said. But there was nothing there; and when Kelly came back from her brief ablutions, they left her. The point of no return, thought Stella. But the point of no return had been passed half an hour ago.

He took Stella down and she flopped wearily onto the disordered sofa and let him bring her a drink and sit there quietly with her while the whiskey did its reviving work. Once he went upstairs and poked his head into the darkened bedroom. "A bit restless, but sound asleep and rather unbeautifully snoring," he reported, grinning.

And when Ricky returned he said the same thing to him. Asleep . . . rather restless . . . Like a doomed ship, thought Stella—rolling, wallowing, settling down at last into the waters of death. "You don't think we'd better—?" Better what? There was nothing now that could be done.

The sound of the stertorous breathing reached them again as she and Ricky made their way to bed. She sent him on ahead, and made a pretense of going into the room to see that all was well. "She's quiet now—only snoring a bit," she said, rejoining him.

"I daresay she was pretty worn out, the silly girl," he said. "She'll be better in the morning." And he added, humbly and gratefully, "Thank you, darling. You were splendid," and kissed her. She turned away her head.

And in the morning the girl was dead. Ann Kelly would smile her sweet, sneering, malicious little smile no more. And Stella Harrison was a murderer.

Suddenly the house was full of policemen, large, slow, kindly spoken men, led by a small, quick, snapping little man called Chief Inspec-

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tor Cockrill. "Sorry about this, Mrs. Harrison. Very unpleasant for you. And you say the girl was hardly known to you, to you or Dr. Harrison either?"

Up at the hospital the head nurse told her story; evidently they had all underestimated the lengths to which the girl would go in her neurotic desire for attention—or the girl herself had overestimated the dose which would be safe to play with.

At the house they went through the anticipated routine. The coffee cup proved all that it had promised—the Chief Inspector dipped in a tentative little fingertip and sucked it. "No, nothing there—just black coffee,"—and gave instructions for a few drops to be poured off and the rest sent to the laboratories. "We'll get a quick analysis done here, Sergeant. I daresay the doctor has some reagents about the place. We won't find anything but it'll be nice to know for certain. Can't be too careful, Mrs. Harrison, for your sake and the doctor's. She might just possibly have smuggled something into it."

"Just as well I didn't wash it," said Stella. "But with all the fuss—"

It was a Sunday. Ricky and Frederick sat wretchedly side by side on the sofa. "I'd have sworn she'd taken nothing."

"So would I," said Frederick.

"You examined her carefully?" asked the Inspector.

"Well—we were both prepared, you see, to believe she'd taken nothing. I know the type," said Ricky, "and they never do take anything; and my wife had seen her pulling up her stocking when she was pretending to be half unconscious. And if she *had* taken the stuff—well, it must have been almost an hour before we saw her, and she'd have been showing symptoms long before that."

"I quite agree," said Frederick. He added slowly, "Of course, Ricky, we were basing the whole thing on the assumption that if she'd taken anything it would have been before she left the hospital—which is what she said. But suppose she had taken it just before she walked in here? She'd have been at such an early stage we'd have been justified in not noticing anything."

"I'd have thought there'd be something, even so," said Ricky. (Silly blind fool! thought Stella—can't he ever leave well alone?)

"I must confess," said Frederick, "that when she went up to bed I did think she seemed overexcited. I said so to you, Stella, didn't I?—and flushed and not flopping about as she had been. But—well, I suppose it was the stocking episode—I was so convinced that it was all an act." He broke off, conscious of a failure and of the dire consequence of that failure to a human life.

When Ricky was uncertain and floundering, Stella could feel only

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irritation and a sort of contempt. Now, with Frederick so unexpectedly at a loss, she was filled with a sense of protectiveness. She pointed out, "I'd just given her strong black coffee for that very purpose—to wake her up."

"You let her put herself to bed, Mrs. Harrison?" the Inspector asked.

"She wouldn't let me help her; we just left her to it."

"She said she was—exhausted was the word," said Frederick thoughtfully. "And that she'd been through a strain. So—once again, you see, we accepted it as natural. But I guess it was actually symptomatic—flushed, excited—"

"And she was breathing very heavily," said Ricky. "I ought to have gone in, I suppose."

These men! They seemed bent on making themselves look like inept fools or worse. "*I* went in," said Stella. "She was snoring, yes; she just seemed heavily asleep."

And so on and so on—question and answer, but quietly, amicably, just talking it over . . . Times, places, words said, words unspoken. The story of the call to the head nurse, a passing reference to the "crush" of the young lady on Dr. Harrison. "No doubt you get lots of that sort of thing?"

"Doctors do," said Ricky briefly.

"And there was a boy friend in the case anyway?"

All unsuspicious, friendly—safe. (Uniforms roaming about the house meanwhile, yes; but what was there to find?)

Chief Inspector Cockrill closed his notebook in which he had been making what appeared to be random scratchings of an indecipherable nature, and rose to his feet. "Perhaps Mrs. Harrison would show me over the house and let me get my bearings." And on the way upstairs he said, toiling after her, "All this must have been most unpleasant for you?"

"Horribly. But I'd never seen the girl before and I can't say I fell in love with her. I don't pretend to be personally upset." (Play it carefully!)

"At least she won't be able to make scenes about the doctor any more. I hear she was always creating them, up at the hospital."

Stella shrugged. "Everyone knew it was really the boy friend who was responsible for the child."

He seemed to pause for a moment. Then he said quickly, "There was never any other suggestion, I suppose?"

She could have cut out her tongue; but anyway Ricky was sure to come blurting out with it sooner or later. She took the bull by the horns. "I daresay she was all for pretending my husband was the father; but of course she had no hope of being believed."

They had come to the landing. He stood there, facing her, small for a policeman, elderly, a crest of gray hair crowning a splendid

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head. "All the same, you must have been worried? Mud sticks. If she'd gone round saying this kind of thing—"

"She couldn't go round saying it if she was dead."

"Just what I was thinking," said Chief Inspector Cockrill.

She lost a little of her poise. "Anyway, we all knew it was this young man at the hospital."

"Oh, you knew that, did you?"

"The head nurse told me when I phoned her."

"But that would be quite towards the end of the evening? By that time," he said, his bright, dark eyes on hers, "you'd have had time to get pretty worked up about it?"

And suddenly it wasn't so friendly and harmless after all; and showing him the room where the girl had died, the bathroom she had briefly visited, she knew that it had never been harmless, not really. Hysteria rose in her, and his hand on the railing as he followed her back down the stairs seemed like a great spider, hairless and horrible, creeping down after her to fasten itself on her very life. She crushed down the panic, forced herself to quietness; but her head seemed stuffed with cotton wool; nothing was clear, she could not remember, could not correlate, could not calculate . . .

And in the hall Ricky came up to her, drawing her out of earshot. "Stella, I'm sure there's some morphine missing from the surgery."

"Nonsense!" she said sharply. "There can't be." They would be asking this question soon; he must, he must, give calm, reassuring answers.

"Suppose she helped herself while she was alone in the room?"

"She never was alone in the room, Ricky. I didn't leave her, not for a second; and then you and Frederick were here. Besides, the key—"

"A nurse would know where to look for the key. We all have some convenient hidey-hole."

"But I tell you, Ricky, she wasn't left alone. Do stop muttering or they'll get suspicious. Later if you like we'll add up the entries in the book if that'll make you any happier."

But not Ricky! Ricky must go forward painfully to the Inspector and say that as he's just been saying to his wife, he has a wretched feeling that there ought to be more morphine—"You see, Stella," he said over their heads to her, "whatever she'd taken must be accounted for somehow. If she got it from here, we mustn't let the blame fall somewhere else."

There was an altercation at the surgery door. Someone was insisting that the child had been knocked down by a car, she wasn't going to carry him round to any other doctor's.

"You go ahead," said Cockrill, seeing Ricky's stricken face as the mother seemed about to be turned

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from the door by the policeman posted there. "I'll just take your poison book and skim through it."

And he sat down with it on his knee, turning the pages earnestly like a child with a picture book. Frederick, comfortably sure that all was well with it, went out to help with the screaming child. After a while the Inspector looked up. "Both doctors would have access to this book, Mrs. Harrison?"

"Of course," said Stella.

"I see they use a ballpoint pen."

"They keep one marking the last page in the book."

"M'm. Useful things," he said, "except that one never has a refill when one wants one. I see in this case they've changed to blue. Up to a week ago it was black."

So that was it! In the dim light last night, she had not been able to see what in daylight would have been perfectly evident—that the two rather smudgy, gray-blue colors were in fact different. Figures on pages chosen at random, two months back, three months, six months—standing out clearly as having been altered in a different-colored ink.

She began to talk rapidly and feverishly. "Do you mean that there's been an alteration in the figures?"

"What gives you that idea?" he said.

"Well, I mean—you're suggesting that they've been altered in the new blue ink. But—well, that shows," she said desperately, "that my husband wouldn't have done such a thing, that none of us would. I mean, we'd know about the change of color, wouldn't we? So it must have been the girl. She must have taken the dose from the poison cabinet and altered the figures in the book—"

"Why?" said Inspector Cockrill.

"Why? Why alter the figures, you mean? Well, she wouldn't want to get my husband into trouble, I suppose. She was in love with him."

"I thought you didn't believe she was in love with him?"

"Well, I seem to have been wrong, don't I? Because, after all, we didn't think she would really commit suicide, but she has, hasn't she? And a nurse would know—poison isn't really that inaccessible, Inspector, to a nurse. It's only the patients who wouldn't know where to find the key—"

"You don't give the practice a reassuring reputation, Mrs. Harrison. Would the book be close to the cabinet?"

"Yes, and with the pen marking the place. At least, that's where it was—"

"Last night?" said the Inspector.

"That's where it would have been last night—because obviously the girl saw it and just picked up the book and altered the figures, farther back where she hoped they wouldn't be noticed—"

"How do you know it was farther back?"

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"Well, you were looking farther back," she said, again desperately. But the cotton wool was clearing away a little. "I only mean that the girl had common sense, and with this phony romance about my husband her mind would work that way. And she'd said that she left a note saying she was going to take morphine—"

"The note said that she *had* taken morphine."

"But we know now that she couldn't have, or they'd have seen the symptoms. And there was none missing from the hospital, so she *must* have taken it from the surgery here."

"Under your very nose, Mrs. Harrison?" She was silent. He insisted, "You did tell me earlier, didn't you, that you never left her alone in there for a moment?"

"I mean . . . I meant . . . Not alone in *that* sense; of course I was in and out . . ."

But Ricky would let her down. Ricky would blurt out, with that idiotic honesty of his, that she had assured him when he questioned her closely that the girl could not possibly have taken the stuff. She thought with dark anger of the harm he had already done, of the dangerous corners skillfully turned only to be blocked by his exasperating, innocent candor. And, damn it all, whose fault was all this in the first place? It was his book, after all, his poison cabinet, his love affair.

His love affair.

For who knew, who could be certain, that Ricky was so exquisitely innocent? No smoke without fire; surely he must have given the girl some encouragement to make her so eager for him? And if so—if so, didn't he deserve everything that was coming to him?—for deceiving her like this, deceiving her with this cheap little, grubby little tart . . .

And if Ricky were out of the way . . . The memory of Frederick's arms around her rose up like an incense, hot and heady. He loves me, she thought. All this time he's been loving me, and both of us just too—well, just too good to hurt Ricky. She remembered the hard, strong arms, his voice when he had called her marvelous . . . What had he said about her "lovely blue eyes"? He had been horrified to see me caught in this sordid drama, seeing me humbled by that dreadful girl—and all because Ricky couldn't keep his hands off the nurses, never caring how he lets me down . . .

She knew now what she must do. She knew that the truth was out—that murder stalked with unveiled face through their house and that she must act. What she had done, she had done to save Richard—done entirely for his sake, she insisted to herself, to save him from the consequences of his own sickening sins. Very well then, if anyone was going to have to pay the

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price, it surely should not be herself? Innocent or guilty, it was *he* who had brought about this horrible tragedy; innocent or guilty, then, let *him* pay.

She raised her blue eyes to Inspector Cockrill's bright brown ones and said, "Inspector, whom do you suspect?"

He looked back at her with a sort of—glitter. "It's my duty to inquire into things, Madam."

She bowed her head. "What am I to say? Well—no, of course, it isn't true that I never left the girl alone. I was just trying to—" And she said, blurting it out, raising miserable blue eyes again, "One must protect those one—loves."

"You are referring to your husband, Mrs. Harrison?"

"My husband?" she said, startled. "Yes, of course. Who else? But, Inspector, don't think for one moment that I believe my husband was the father of this girl's child."

"Oh, I don't, Madam," he said, with the faintest possible mocking imitation of her tone.

"Of course it was upsetting. She threatened to make disgusting scenes at the hospital; as you said, it wasn't till much later that we knew, when I talked to the head nurse, that there was nothing really to worry about." She added with apparent inconsequence that her husband had gone back to his patient by then.

"Leaving the sedative tablets for the young lady to take?"

She permitted herself one terrified, upward glance, then lowered her eyes. "Six small white tablets. I wondered perhaps if such a large dose could have contributed to her death? Quite innocently, of course; only if it were administered on top of whatever quantity of morphine she had given herself—"

"Very ingenious, Madam. But that wouldn't account for the alterations in the book, would it?"

"I wish you wouldn't keep calling me Madam," said Stella, fluttering. "Why suddenly so formal? You don't suspect *me* of being a murderer, do you?"

"How could I?" he said. "You had no opportunity, had you?"

"I gave the girl that coffee—"

He shook his head. "No poison there—we've already done a rough check."

She breathed more freely. "Well, but I *was* alone with her for some time, earlier."

"Only for a few minutes, really. No time for any other teas or coffees, and if you'd given her any pills or powder undisguised, she'd have mentioned it. And later one or both of the gentlemen was with her all the time. You didn't even see her to bed; you came straight down with Dr. Graham."

"I did go into her room for a moment," said Stella, "on my way to bed." She let it hover in the air a moment. "But of course Dr. Graham had seen the first symptoms before that—hadn't he?"

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It had caught him on the hop: he gave her his bright, appraising glance. "Of course," said Stella, "she might have smuggled something up to bed with her, and that's why she wouldn't let me stay."

"But as you've just said, Dr. Graham had already seen the symptoms. And it still doesn't account for the book."

The last hope gone; and she was glad. With Ricky out of the way . . . She said, "Inspector, frankly, do you suspect someone?"

He gave her a wouldn't-you-like-to-know glance, turning back the pages of his notebook, narrowing his eyes, underlining half a dozen words. Which they were, she could not see; but might she not hazard a guess? "He placed six tablets on the mantelpiece. Frederick had said, 'Rather a large dose?' and Ricky had accounted for it glibly. 'These Restuwell things are very mild.' But if they had *not* been Restuwell . . ."

The two men came in from the surgery, their hands moist and pink from washing, after their ministrations to the child. Inspector Cockrill rose. "Doctor, a word with you, if you wouldn't mind?" Ricky acquiesced unsuspiciously and they went off together to the surgery. Stella was left alone with Frederick. He said compassionately, "You look all in."

But she was all right again now —only still sick and dizzy with relief, after the traps and tensions of the past horrible half hour. She went up close to him, collapsed against him, pushing her forehead into his shoulder; leaning there. He put one arm around her and gave her a little shake. "Bear up, love! Nothing more to worry about now. He just wants to check the poison book with Ricky, I suppose; and then they'll all clear out and everything will be as it was."

She did not move. She said faintly (and could not damp down the stabbing thought, half grim, half humorous, that after all she was behaving just like the departed Miss Kelly): "After last night, Frederick, nothing can ever again be quite 'as it was'."

He released himself, taking her by the shoulders, holding her away from him, looking down, smiling into her eyes. "My dear, don't take it so desperately! The poor girl's dead but there's nothing we can do about it. It—"

She interrupted him. "I mean—you and me."

"You and me, Stella?"

And she knew: already, at the very sound of his voice as he said it, puzzled, "You and me, Stella?" —she knew: it was all for nothing, he did not love her, it was madness to go on. But she was driven on, she could not help herself.

"Now that we've—found each other, Frederick, don't let's go on keeping up this terrible pretense. After all I've gone through, honestly I couldn't bear any more."

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She felt the withdrawal, the repudiation, the shock: but she could not accept it, she could not let the dream go. "When you held me in your arms last night, when you said I was marvelous—"

"You were marvelous," he said, trying to wrench the whole thing back to normality before it was too late, trying to save her from her own shame. "You behaved like an angel—"

She thrust herself against him, clinging to his arm. "Don't hold me off, Frederick, please don't let's pretend any more—" And her nervous volubility got the better of her; she began to babble again, pouring out with bitter spite her ugly defamation of Ricky—Ricky supposed to be so honorable and upright and all the time betraying her with a dirty little strumpet like that. Her gorge rose as she saw the girl before her, lolling in the chair, the author of all the terror and trouble of the past horrible hours, and she poured out her loathing, dredging up from the depths of her soul all the hates and passions and eroticisms of the long, unloving, unlovely years.

"Why should he stand in our way, what do we owe to him any longer?—deceiving me, betraying me, messing about with a trollop like that, getting her pregnant and then when she promises trouble, murdering her, *murdering* her—honestly I wouldn't put it past him to have shut her mouth."

As he tore himself free from her grip she clutched at him again, yearning up into his face, blind to all but the knowledge that this scene must continue, must go on, go on and never end; because when it was ended there would be nothing left of hope. "Oh, Frederick! At least you and I are free of it all, we belong to each other." She was beyond control, shaking, shuddering, her hands clawing at his arms.

He gave one mighty heave, thrusting her away from him. He lifted his hand and hit her across her ashen face—and slammed out of the room.

She fell back onto the sofa, where only last night that hateful, smiling, evil little creature had lolled and taunted and brought this ruin into all their lives. Now she was defeated. She had murdered—and for nothing. She had betrayed an innocent man, her husband, and if last night she had dreaded poverty with him, what would it be like now, without him as the bread winner? What would it be like with a husband in prison for a sordid murder? Divorce?

But of what use was a divorce when the dream was gone?—that dream which she now recognized with bitter disillusion as nothing but the figment of her own sick imagination. She put her hand to her cheek, rose, and stood staring into the looking glass over the mantelpiece.

Six little tablets had lain there,

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six white tablets on whose innocence she herself had cast the first shadow of doubt—the shadow which now stretched out so dark and dangerous over the life of the only person in the world who cared for her. "Oh, God—Ricky!" she whispered to that white face staring back at her from the mirror. "What have I done to him?"

But . . . she began to see that all might not yet be lost, that at one swoop she might still save Ricky and repay the humiliation of that blow across the face. She heard the slam of the door as Frederick burst out of the house, the angry altercation with the policeman stationed outside. She began frantically to tidy her disordered hair, straighten her dress, steady her shaking hands. She went out into the hall. "Inspector, could I see you one minute, in here?"

Ricky was standing in the hall. He gave her a look that frightened and puzzled her—a look of incredulous, heartbroken reproach. Well, she must explain it all away later—she could always manage Ricky. Meanwhile—

"Sit down, Inspector. I've got to tell you something." She perched herself, knees nervously locked together, on the edge of the sofa. "This is horrible for me, absolutely horrible. May I ask you first—am I right in thinking that you suspect my husband? I mean, the poison book being altered—"

He was eyeing her curiously. "As to that, it's fair to tell you that your husband says he simply can't understand it."

"And then those tablets—six little tablets that were supposed to be Restuwell, but could have been morphine—"

He continued to watch her.

She was calm again now; but she said on a rising note, "—and which my husband never administered to that girl."

He jerked up his head. "Didn't give them to the girl?"

"Don't you remember the evidence, Inspector? He put them on the mantelpiece and then left the house."

"I see," said the Chief Inspector.

"I went into another room to telephone the hospital. When I came back, there were still six tablets on the mantelpiece. The girl wouldn't take them from me and it was Dr. Graham who eventually got them down her." She sat up very straight. "Inspector, my husband's in danger. *Who is to say that those were the same tablets he left for the girl to take?"*

Inspector Cockrill sat for a moment very still. When he spoke it was equably. "You mean that Dr. Graham might have slipped across to the surgery while you were telephoning, taken the morphine tablets, picked up the pen and altered the book, then exchanged the pills without the girl realizing it?"

It was beautifully neat. "You'd already worked it out, hadn't you?"

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"One has to think of all possibilities," said the Inspector.

"Nothing was said as to whether he left the room while I was phoning."

"But what could his motive have been?" asked the Inspector.

"The girl could have destroyed the practice, you know, with all this vicious scandal." She saw his deprecatory glance. "But of course, Inspector, that was not the real motive." And she straightened her shoulders, clasping her hands on her knee till the knuckles were gleaming knobs of ivory against the dull white flesh. She said again, "This is horrible for me—but I *must* protect my husband. You see, Dr. Graham is in love with me."

That brought him up, startled. "In love with you?"

"I think it had been going on for years," she said sadly. "He never said anything; I never knew and, God knows, Ricky never knew. But last night—well, it started with his just being kind and comforting and then—he just lost his head, I suppose; he put his arms round me, he called me wonderful and marvelous, he raved about my blue eyes—all that sort of thing. I was utterly taken aback. What my husband would say if he knew!"

The Inspector was silent again. He said at last, "Hardly account for the murder of the girl though, would it?"

Stella grew excited. "Do you understand *anything* about that girl, Inspector? She was vicious and hysterical and a dangerous mischief-maker. She hated me because she fancied herself in love with my husband—she'd have done anything to blacken my name. And she witnessed all this, you see. I suppose he thought she was half doped, but anyway, as I say, he'd simply lost his head, he didn't care whether she was there or not.

"But then she could have destroyed us, could have destroyed us all. Bad enough running round saying that she was having a baby by my husband, but if she could add to it that my husband's associate was having an affair with *me!* And all so easy for him!—people knew about the Ricky business, but nobody in the world knew about this; Frederick was the very last person to be suspected. And she was so utterly worthless; and after all, she wanted to die—he'd argue to himself that she was telling everybody that she wanted to die."

It was strange how clear her mind was now, taking into consideration every point, every twist and turn; and yet how limited—for somewhere in her consciousness was the knowledge that this was not all. Yet what could one do but meet each blow, each setback, as it came—or before it came.

"This morning when I realized you suspected my husband—well, Inspector, there are only three people involved and I knew that my husband was no more guilty than

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I was. So I engineered Ricky out of the room—I knew you'd ask him to show you the poison book. You see, I wanted you *both* out of the way, I wanted to make a test. I spoke to Dr. Graham, I went up close to him, I let him think that what he'd said last night had been —well, not unwelcome to me. He responded at once. He put his arms round me, he called me his angel; and I played up to him, I said things against my husband, I pretended to believe that Ricky had deceived me with that girl.

"And then I drew back from him and looked into his face, Inspector, and I said that if my husband were convicted of her murder, then he and I would be free. He knew at once by the look on my face that I'd realized the truth—that he'd killed the girl himself, knowing Ricky would be blamed. And once again he lost his head; he pushed me violently aside, knocking his hand against my face—you can see the mark—and rushed out of the house. God knows where! To think up his version, I suppose—no doubt *I* made up to *him,* no doubt it was *I* who wanted my husband accused! But you'll be ready for that now, Inspector. You'll be ready for anything that comes."

"Yes," he said. "I'll be ready for anything that comes."

She was exhausted, her mind twisting through the terrible underground of her doubts and fears; but she forced herself to a sort of outward calmness, sitting down quietly, hiding her shaking hands in her lap; very pale, head bent, eyes cast down. "It's—not a pretty story," she said.

He sat down beside her and a little to her astonishment leaned over and put his fingers to her wrist. He said, "Now, do you know, Mrs. Harrison, I think that's rather where you and I disagree. I think it is a pretty story—as pretty a story as I ever listened to—even prettier than the one you told me before."

Terror rose in her, a wild upward surge. "What do you mean? What story?"

"The story about your husband," he said. He left his thin hard hand across her wrist, like the hand of a mother absently quietening her child while her mind is elsewhere. "You've been very clever, Mrs. Harrison. You've stuck so closely to the truth—and that's what most people fail to do. The conversation with Dr. Graham just now—I daresay my sergeant, outside in the hall, will confirm every word that passed between you. Just a matter of the interpretation—which of course everything may be, when one comes to look closely at it. Don't you agree?"

And he dropped his note of sardonic banter and said sharply, "For instance, that coffee?"

"The coffee?" she faltered. (But surely she was safe there? Surely she had made no mistake?—the

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lipstick on the rim, the fingerprints, hers as well as the girl's, just as they would have been, no silly nonsense about wiping away all the prints—she'd been rather proud of that.) "I gave her some coffee, yes. My husband told me to."

"That's right. He told you to. You left the two men in the surgery with the girl and went to the kitchen. That gave you a little time to think, I suppose. Suddenly you came back and packed them all off to the drawing room. That's true, isn't it? It's in your own statement."

"Yes, it's true. Why not? I thought it would be more comfortable for them in the drawing room. There's only one decent chair in the surgery."

"You said earlier that the reason was that you might be interrupted by an emergency patient."

"That too. All sorts of considerations."

"One consideration would be that it left the surgery empty?"

"I suppose you mean for me to go there and get the morphine tablets?"

"Thank you," he said, and again he had that glitter in his eye. "Morphine tablets stirred into the coffee—hot, strong black coffee with lots of sugar in it so that she would not taste anything else. You came back into the drawing room and handed the cup to her—"

—and screamed at her to drink it, drink it! Would Frederick now come hurrying forward with damaging, dangerous recollections like these? The cotton wool was closing down on her once more, stifling her brain with its clouds of unreason. She clawed her way through it feebly, up to the surface. "And may I ask—when did I alter the book?"

"Any time," he said. "Then or later. I don't think that matters. You'd given her the coffee and in the words of the poet there was 'poison i' the cup'."

She rallied her whole fighting spirit. "A literary policeman—how engaging!"

He gave her a small sardonic bow. Let the poor mouse take what cheap comfort it may, the bow seemed to say, before the cat gobbles it up.

And yet, after all . . . What can he prove? she thought. He's just trying to bluff me. He knows, yes; but if I admit nothing, his knowledge is of no use to him, none at all. All right, so I could have taken the morphine, I could have altered the book; but when could I have administered the dose? Not when I was alone with the girl, or she'd have said so—when she said, for example, that I'd probably put arsenic in the next hot drink I gave her. And for the rest of the time I was never alone with her, or anyway not till after she'd begun to show symptoms. There's only the cup of coffee, and while he may guess about that, he can't know—the cup is safe. All I have to do is

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stand firm and not let myself be drawn out.

And in the blessed relief of it, she asked, taunting him, the mouse growing suddenly large and mocking, insolently menacing, not a mouse any longer but a rat with bared white fangs, the match for any stupid great cat: "And do let me ask you, Inspector, did you—'in the words of the poet'—*find* any poison in the cup?"

"No," he said. "You'd been careful to rinse that out."

"But the cup still had dregs in it."

"From the dregs in the coffee pot, no doubt."

"Goodness," she said, all sarcasm, "how neat!"

"Yes, it was," he said. "Very neat. Nobody else, by the way, could have handled the cup? Your own story confirms that?"

"Oh, certainly," she said. "I'm not afraid of the cup, not in the least. I take full responsibility—nobody went into the kitchen after I left the cup on the drainboard. With some dregs of coffee in it, Inspector, and nothing else—you said so yourself. You dipped your little finger into it and you said, 'Nothing here but plain black coffee.'"

And her voice faltered and the room swam about her and suddenly it was stiflingly hot and yet at the same time dankly cold; and about her wrist Chief Inspector Cockrill's hand had fastened, hard as steel. "Yes, just plain black coffee. You'd forgotten to put any sugar in the dregs," he said.

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There is, we think, a perpetual fascination about a crime (and its detection) set against an academic background. Is it because murder, for example, seems so completely out of place in the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of a school, university, library, or museum? And yet teachers and researchers and librarians and administrators are all people—flesh-and-blood people with the hates and fears and other emotions that so often breed murder . . . Here is an academic locale and an academic dramatis personæ and what certainly looks like an academic crime; but an academic crime can sometimes be ironically unacademic . . .

AN ACADEMIC CRIME

by HENRY T. PARRY

I HAVE NEITHER WIFE NOR CHICK nor child. Beyond a sound classical education (as it used to be called when all three words meant something different from what they mean today—an education, I might add, of dubious value to the outside world but a source of inestimable delight to me) I have nothing but my library of 5000 books, most of them in hard-cover editions. My steady research into the wines of New York and California has come to little enough and my means are far too meager to permit any serious assessment of the so-called nobler vintages. I often tantalize myself with the question: which would you rather own, the New York Public Library or a vineyard in Niagara County?

But I do have my job—the best possible job in the world for a person like me. The University here, where I teach one course, includes the museum whose Egyptian wing is under my supervision. Dr. Langer has the Far Eastern wing, and Perkins Tyndall the paintings—the "software" as we tell him. My job may not be up there with the princes and prelates; but it was not bad, not bad. I was happy and content. Until recently—until Crosley became the head man.

We were a merry enough group here under old Folds, Crosley's predecessor. For example, it was our custom to gather for tea every afternoon in the paneled study off Dr. Folds's office where a fire was generally going. Colleagues whom we had known from other schools

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and who were in town working on our material would sometimes join us; but usually it was just the four of us—Dr. Folds, Dr. Langer, Perkins Tyndall, and myself, Thomas Jenkins. (Speaking of colleagues, how rewarding and heart-warming it was to find in the Foreword of some scholarly work the words "and to the staff of the museum of the University without whose generous and informed help" and so forth.) At Christmas and at the end of term Dr. Folds would have lunch sent in and I would be challenged to bring forth what I had found noteworthy in my research among the vineyards of North America.

"Dr. Jenkins," Dr. Folds would say, refilling his glass from the bottom of the second bottle of, say, a dry Semillon, "you have hereby taken your place near the top of a long list of bookworms whose second field of endeavor is more interesting than their first."

He was referring to my manuscript on the Memphite dynasty on which I had worked for ten years and which had to be revised constantly as zealous archeologists were always digging up new material, and naturally I could not publish without the latest data. We ended that session—Christmas I believe it was—singing the medieval students' song, *Gaudeamus Igitur,* which inspired Dr. Folds to say that it reminded him of the definition of strategy attributed to the Confederate general, Bedford Forrest: "Igitur fustest with the mostest." As I say, we were merry enough in those days.

But dear, good Dr. Folds died tranquilly in his sleep at one of those large committee meetings the University was forever convoking and they brought in J. Stewart Crosley who had been heading up a rubber-money, or maybe it was a beer-money, museum in the mid-West. Some say that he brought one of the biggest contributors with him. His wife.

This is not to say that fault could be found with Mr. Crosley's professional attainments. Indeed, they were thought to be impeccable because several museums and libraries were seeking his services, as he subsequently informed us. You have seen—everyone has seen—his picture in the papers, receiving an award, handing out a plaque, or greeting a tiara-ed triad at one of the fashionable pre-opening openings of a traveling collection.

Sometimes, I understand, he is on television. Dynamic, short in stature and long in speech, with a white wing of hair falling across his forehead in scholarly disarray, energetic bow tie reinforced with a jib-angled pipe, forthright blue eyes that invited the world to examine the righteousness of his position, and the broad, trust-inducing brow of the insurance man in the ads or the citizen who raises the question at the New England

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town meeting, J. Stewart Crosley was the archetype of the vibrant, hard-driving administrator who gracefully conceals his great learning and knows that the techniques for making a museum a success were not too different from those of any promotional enterprise in the business world.

Our fears concerning Crosley were confirmed in the case of Grindell, the graduate student. About ten years ago someone of persuasion over at the Law School was working on early Chinese law and had caused funds to be transferred from the Law School budget to the museum budget to pay for the research services of a graduate assistant in rooting out material in Dr. Langer's Far Eastern Department. The work had long since been published but through an administrative oversight the transfer of funds continued. Indeed, when the bursar's office converted from sweet old lady clerks, largely the relicts of faculty members, to a computerized data processing system, the amount was mysteriously doubled.

We delightedly held our breaths and waited for the correction which never came, thus confirming our opinion of the affluence which prevailed at the Law School. Dr. Folds let us each in turn have the grant to underwrite students working for their doctorates in our respective fields. It was currently my turn and I had Grindell.

To be frank, I did not like Grindell. There was about him a driving quality, a gray aggressiveness, a plodding and calculating methodism—as though he regarded scholarship as a form of siegecraft rather than a frontal assault upon the unknown. In his undergraduate days Grindell had been a shot-putter which seemed to me the precisely suitable activity for one of his heavy nature. At times I felt that he approached his subject as though it were a weighted shot, to be laboriously hurled at nothing. While my own appearance is such that I should refrain from commenting on that of another, I could but regard as distasteful his seeming to be constantly afflicted with a head cold. As for Grindell's wife, one would have conceived an instant dislike for her were it not that Grindell exercised a prior claim to one's prejudices. But what disturbed me most, and I had no classifiable reason for so feeling, was the appearance of Grindell's two children who, unlike most children who are normally absorbed in what they are doing, seemed more concentrated on what was being done to them.

But in honesty I ask myself if my dislike for Grindell did not have its subconscious birth in his extraordinary success with the Kharusian tablets.

These ancient clay records, covered with tiny hieroglyphs, had

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been in the museum's possession for years, acquired among the great gifts of the early twenties, and had assumed in the eyes of the then-current translators something of the character of the once undecipherable linear B of Crete. Several translators had attempted the writing but none was able to decode it—although it must be remarked that not one had devoted enough serious time to conclude justifiably that the tablets could not be translated. I had attempted it on occasion myself but not in a sufficiently meaningful manner so as to make any headway.

But Grindell had pounded away at it and had stumbled across the key which enabled him to decipher the writing. He had written it up for the *Journal* and received much favorable comment, and in all fairness it was indeed a remarkable accomplishment for anyone, let alone a graduate student. As to the worth of what the tablets set forth after translation, well, they described the holdings of a temple, mostly cattle and grain. But perhaps I speak out of the jealousy natural to anyone who sees a younger man rising in his field.

One morning Grindell clumped into my office, his face working.

"Dr. Jenkins, could you tell me more about this, about what's happened?"

"Grindell, I don't know that anything has happened. You tell me."

"I'm finished. I'll never get my doctorate now. And I needed only this year. Then I could have started my book on—"

"What do you mean, you're finished? You're doing your dissertation under my guidance, such as it is, and I have not been informed of any change in your status."

"Mr. Crosley just called me into his office and told me. He says my grant is to be terminated at the end of this month. Not the end of the academic year, mind you, but this month. He says the money was improperly granted to the museum. Do you know what this means? I have no other resources. We have had a difficult time as it is and it's only because of Vera's night-time job that we've been able to manage."

I calmed him as best I could and set out to face Crosley, irritated by the human and bureaucratic dislike of Crosley's bypass. If this were an indication of the way Crosley intended to run the museum I meant to find it out now and force a showdown. Grindell, after all, was my graduate student and plodding and pedantic though he was, heavens knows, he did have the true dedication of the scholar. Nor should budgetary sleight of hand be permitted to ruin a promising career.

"Well, well, Jenkins," Crosley greeted me, polished and self-possessed, rocking from heel to toe as though trying to increase tem-

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porarily his somewhat meager height. "Well, well, whoever would believe that you and Langer and Tyndall, not to mention my sainted predecessor Folds, would be guilty of diverting University funds to the use of the museum. And Law School funds at that! A kind of donnish swindle to further scholarly pursuits, eh?"

"But, Crosley, the money comes out of the same general fund and we feel that we have better use for it than the Law School. The endowments for scholarships in my field are not generous. And if ever a person showed more promise than Grindell or needed the money more desperately—"

"Such pecuniary *schlampferei* may have been well and good in the days of Folds, but let me assure you, my good Jenkins"—he knew that I disliked this form of address although I had never given any outward sign—"my good Jenkins," he repeated, "I shall turn what remains of this allotment back to where it belongs. Grindell—where do you find students with such names, Jenkins?—is off the payroll. Definitely."

I thought I could hear the cash-register drawer clack shut in his head. You'll turn it back, I said to myself, but not without making some kind of deal at the bursar's office and certainly not without bringing it up—oh, in an offhand manner, of course, as befits such minor business as a brilliant scholar's future—at the University Council meeting as further evidence of your probity and efficient, businesslike administration. I muttered something and left abruptly, knowing that nothing irritated our *Herr Direktor* more than being on the technically—that is, financially—right side of a case and not having an audience before whom to enlarge his views.

Our director had another habit which ruffled our feathers, so long and so tactfully smoothed during Dr. Folds's tenure. I refer to his practice of nightly inspections.

To get from my office on the second floor to the main staircase it is necessary to cross the balcony that runs along the south wall of the great vaulted hall where my Egyptian collection is displayed. Directly beneath the balcony was the exit from Tyndall's section of the museum, the paintings, the immediately adjacent room housing the abstract expressionists. It amused me to note the look of relief that marked the faces of the people who, after trudging about in a this-is-art? and I-could do-better-myself bewilderment, emerged into the comprehensible realities of Egyptian stone. Tyndall was quite sick of hearing me tell about them, as I frequently did at lunch.

The balcony was enclosed by a waist-high balustrade and railing on whose wide top I had set out eight identical urns. One side of

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each urn showed the carving of a warrior with a bow and the other a sacrificial ox. To prevent them from being pushed off the railing to the floor below, I had run a taut steel wire through one ear of each vessel and fastened the wire to screw eyes set into the opposing walls at each end of the railing. This precaution was more than a safety measure, for even though the public was not admitted to the balcony, loose, unwatched items often disappeared, even objects as heavy as these urns which weighed between five and six pounds each.

On my way out every night it was my custom to pause here, and leaning over the broad railing, contemplate the vast darkening room below me with its tombs of forgotten great ones of the earth, their mummy cases leaning against the walls like spaced, indolent sentinels. Sometimes on his way out Grindell would rest his always loaded brief case on the wide railing and stand with me, as entranced as I was by the mystery and antiquity displayed below. I'll say this for Grindell: he knew when to be quiet.

It was during such contemplative pauses on the balcony, the museum hushed and nearly deserted, that Grindell and I observed that each evening at precisely 6:15 our new director made a tour of inspection. We would hear his footsteps approach from the room of the abstract expressionists and stop below where we were standing. There, hands jammed into coat pockets, his bow tie jaunty, Mr. Crosley would stand, rocking back and forth on his gleaming shoes, surveying my exhibits as though, or so it seemed to me, he longed to bulldoze them out of existence and replace them with stone puddings or plumbing busywork. Occasionally he scribbled in his notebook, leaning it on a nearby mummy case to log some real or fancied dereliction.

With the wrong-headed illogic of any normal bureaucrat, I, of course, resented these clandestine examinations. Tyndall confessed that this was also his reaction when he discovered that Crosley was going through his Department after hours. Perhaps we carried over the entrenched resistance that any Department Head has to his superior —for example, to the president of the college. While the man did head up the museum and inspection was certainly within his province, was it necessary for him to come snooping about *every* night? And at a time when the Department Head responsible was usually absent?

Many a night, as Grindell and I looked down at our director, I barely conquered a childish impulse to spit on his silver-winged, unsuspecting head. By some unspoken understanding we stood there silently, watching him pass

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along the great hall between the tombs and the mummy cases, to disappear through the far exit. I could not help thinking that Grindell and I resembled nothing so much as two predatory owls stalking a mouse they were forbidden to eat.

The day after my clash with Crosley over the termination of Grindell's grant—one of those days on which the museum opened at one rather than the customary ten—I decided to attach myself to a guided tour, a practice that kept me *au courant* with the new displays and frequently taught me something new about the permanent exhibits. A tour was forming in the Main Hall and even though it was to visit the Egyptian wing I joined it, hoping to learn the public's reaction to our exhibits and, I must confess it, to hear the guide deliver the text I had prepared. My companions were members of the Women's Club of Ridge Rock, blue-haired and furred, and we followed our guide in dutiful column through the rooms where Tyndall's pictures were hung and, passing beneath my twilight vantage point on the balcony, came out into the great hall of the Egyptian wing.

Leading us over to one of the mummy cases leaning against the wall like oversized violin cases, our guide told us: "The figure carved on the lid of the case was intended to depict the likeness of the person within. Naturally, only the rich and highly placed could afford cases such as these. Note, too, that the case is designed to fit the human figure quite snugly. There are some who think that they can detect traces of the bitumen, spices, and honey that were used during the, uh, proceedings. Now if we look inside—"

He lifted off the cover and placed it against the wall. Behind him the TV-hardened ladies gasped and a few screamed tentatively, uncertain whether or not the sight before them was a planned part of the exhibit. For there, fitting quite as snugly as the guide had described, his silver wing of hair draped dramatically over his forehead as it inevitably was in his publicity pictures, was J. Stewart Crosley, B.A., M.F.A. When the ambulance crew arrived, three more letters would be added to his name. D.O.A.—dead on arrival.

I told the guide to take the party back to the Main Hall and to send me any guards he found on the way. Alone, I looked closely at Crosley's body and noted the slight but sickening disproportion of that statesman-like brow. No autopsy would be needed to determine that death had resulted from a head injury.

There was no evidence of struggle or of a weapon. Two dull marks, mere cloudings of the polish of the floor, trailed erratically back toward the entrance below the balcony, a trail that might have

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been made by dragging rubber heels. When the guards appeared, I assigned one to the entrance under the balcony and the other to the far exit, and went to call the police.

I rushed up the main staircase and as I crossed the balcony on the way to my office I was aware of some indefinable departure from the norm. A change too small to be immediately obvious, too significant to be completely unnoticed, had occurred in the physical arrangement of the balcony. In the stress of the moment I could not pause to diagnose the cause of my impression. From the tiny room set apart as Grindell's working space came the remorseless pecking of a typewriter. Grindell the plugger, the scholar with the shot-putter's approach, was—

Suddenly the disparate pieces fell into place and I knew what had changed in the environment of the balcony. I walked back along the railing and found it.

In mystery stories the identity of the guilty person is usually the problem to be solved, and properly so. But in life, in tragic life, such identity is not often in doubt, even when proof is lacking. Thus it was with Crosley's killer. I went back and knocked at Grindell's door. The typewriter ceased and Grindell opened the door; it was characteristic of him first to examine a visitor rather than to call out a casual "Come in."

"Crosley has been murdered. The body was discovered downstairs." I watched him closely but he showed only the shock that could have normally been expected. "I'm going to call the police now. I think I know how it was done."

"How?" Grindell stared dumbly down at his typewriter keys, sensing perhaps that their communion might now be broken forever.

"Crosley was killed as he stood below the balcony inspecting the Egyptian wing. He was struck on the head by one of the urns we keep on the balcony railing. The killer unfastened and drew out the wire that keeps the urns from falling off accidentally, and attached the wire to one urn only, the second one from the end. He waited until Crosley paused beneath the balcony and dropped the urn on his head. Using the wire, he drew the urn back up to the balcony, thus leaving no sign of a weapon downstairs. The wire prevented the urn from striking the floor and being broken.

"Then he went down to the floor of the wing and hid the body in the first available place, a mummy case. There are faint marks, heel marks without doubt, that indicate something was dragged. The killer then rushed back upstairs, rethreaded the wire through the ear of each urn and refastened it to the screw hooks in the walls. Those urns weigh five or six pounds each and would present no problem in han-

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dling, especially to someone who had experience—say, as a shot-putter. A normal shot weighs sixteen pounds, I understand."

Grindell looked at me, his usually stolid face animated by an animal alertness.

"What reason do you have for thinking an urn was—"

"The urns on the balcony railing, all eight of them, have identical scenes carved on their sides—a warrior with a bow on one side and a sacrificial ox on the other. All eight had the warrior side turned outward facing the big hall and the ox scene turned inward toward the balcony. But if you will go out there now and look, you will see that one urn, the second from the end, is turned the other way, with the warrior facing inward toward the balcony. When the killer replaced the urn he neglected to match it with the other seven."

"What will you tell the police?"

What indeed? To my mind the problem of who killed J. Stewart Crosley was solved. I was as certain of Grindell's guilt as if I had actually witnessed him drop the stone vessel on Crosley's head. But now what? My credo rested on the observance of the rule of law, including the laws you do not agree with. I knew it to be my obligation, even my moral duty, to report what I had observed to the police. For of the limitless varieties of crime which man has devised in his brief history and out of his unending capacity for doing wrong, had not Grindell committed the gravest? Murder.

But supposing I were to ignore my legal and moral obligations, would it be prudent for me to overlook another factor—my personal safety? Grindell knew that I held him guilty of Crosley's murder even though I had carefully refrained from linking him by name with the crime. If Grindell were to go free, could I ever again continue my work in peace, knowing that a violent man regarded my existence as a continuing threat to his freedom?

Another thought came to me, of which I was immediately ashamed: if I reported everything to the police I could eliminate a rising competitor in my own field of scholarship.

But if I made a complete report to the police of what I knew, then what? Suppose Grindell were to confess, which I doubted he would do, or were to be tried and convicted on the basis of what I had found? He had motive surely, since Crosley had cancelled his grant; he had opportunity; since he knew of Crosley's nightly inspections; and he had expert ability. The police would not be slow in establishing these facts.

But despite the gravity of his crime, the dangerous undercurrent of violence in his nature, and his grubbiness and insensitivity, Grindell was too valuable a man to

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waste long years shut up in prison. With the archeologists turning up more discoveries nearly every day—and the builders of dams drowning even more—we would have need of the Grindells. If anyone was to be spared the consequences of his wrongdoing, should not the choice fall upon those who lived the life of the mind, who held the outposts against our great enemy, ignorance? After all, it was not as though Crosley were one of us; one administrator more or less is of small consequence—but scholars, however criminal, were too rare for me to reduce their number, even by one.

"Nothing," I said. "I shall tell the police nothing. Now I am going to my office to call them. It will probably take me about ten minutes. Yes, ten minutes I think should be adequate. Ten minutes."

When I left my office after telephoning the police, I could hear once more the searching tap of Grindell's typewriter. I passed the row of urns on the balcony railing and noted that all eight now matched, the sacrificial oxen turned inward, the protective wire taut from wall to wall.

Then as I went down the main staircase to await the arrival of the police my great idea came to me. I would suggest—at the appropriate time, of course—to the University Council that they give consideration to the establishment of the J. Stewart Crosley Memorial Fund. And it would be most fitting, surely, if the first award were to be made to Grindell.

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Robert Twohy has written some fine stories for EQMM—"Out of This Nettle" (January 1962); "Routine Investigation" (April 1964—an early detective story of the Absurd); "The Man on the Spot" (June 1968); "McKevitt—100 Proof" (October 1968); and others written under a pseudonym—but we'll let you guess, or deduce, which ones they were.

Now, here is Robert Twohy's latest—an unusual story even for him, with a theme that is comparatively new for EQMM . . .

UP WHERE THE AIR IS CLEAN

by ROBERT TWOHY

BEN GOT IN THE CAB. HIS UNCLE Al shoved his bulk in after him, grunting to the driver, "Brockford Towers."

They started uptown.

Al said, "You nervous?"

Ben frowned. Then he shrugged. "Maybe. A little."

"So, why not? You're on your way to meet a big man. Today your whole future opens up."

Ben glanced at his uncle, taking in the cheap brown suit, the cracked shoes, the pouches in the broad red-veined face. There was a faint smell of whiskey. Uncle Al wasn't drunk this afternoon, hadn't drunk today, but the whiskey smell was there. It must come from his clothes.

Al was nodding. "You'll go a long way. You're your father all over again."

Ben knew it was true. He had the same pale, thin-featured face, the same large dark eyes that showed in the photograph of his father that hung over the mantel in Al's apartment. His father had been somebody and Ben was going to be somebody. Today was the beginning—he was on his way now to meet Mr. Cost, the Division Leader—the third or fourth most powerful man in The Family.

Mr. Cost had been at last Monday's meeting—one of the silent elders, sitting in the shadows, watching as Ben and the other four initiates came, one by one, to the

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long table, and spoke the oath with one hand grasping the dagger, and sipped the wine mixed with blood.

None of the elders had shown himself or spoken to the initiates that night, but two days later, word had come: Uncle Al should bring Ben to Mr. Cost's suite at the Brockford Towers.

"It means just one thing," Al had said. "It means that he's singled you out. You're going to start in The Family not as an ordinary soldier, but as a Special."

In a few years, if things worked out, Ben would be climbing the ladder. In ten, fifteen years—well, who could say? In The Family, if you were chosen as a Special, how far you went depended on what you had inside of you. How far would Ben's drives take him in ten, fifteen years?

The cab had left the grubby downtown area where Ben and his uncle lived, and had entered a section of tall apartments, stone and glass soaring into the sky. Ben glanced up. He had a feeling, as he looked at the buildings with their edges standing out sharp against the clear sky, that the air was different up there. Up there the air was clean.

"Well," said Al, rubbing his hands and smiling, "we're here."

Ben said, as they got out, "Let me take care of the cab."

"No, the cab is on me. This is my big day as much as it is yours."

Ben tried not to be irritated by his uncle's sentimentality. Al had been good to him. Twelve years ago, when his father had got killed, his uncle and aunt had taken him in, and all those years it was like he was their son.

When Aunt Rose had died last year, Al had started the heavy drinking. He had told Ben, "If it wasn't for you, my hopes for you, I'd go off the bridge. What else do I have to live for?"

Well, Ben was going to climb high, high, and he would look out for his uncle. Al was going to have decent clothes and a good apartment and good whiskey instead of the rotgut he poured into himself. Ben was going to pay back what he owed him. The old boy had some good years coming to him . . .

Mr. Cost's apartment was on the seventeeenth floor. It was quiet, and sunlight came in the windows, and there was no music; but Ben had the feeling that the apartment was like quiet music. He had never been in a place like this. The air in the apartment was thin and clean.

The white-jacketed houseboy who had let them in stepped aside. A fat man with a wide shining face sat on a white couch. He wore a beautiful soft blue suit. It was strained tight over his thighs, which were like huge rolls of meat.

"Mr. Cost," Al said, in a tight voice.

The fat man's eyes were on Ben.

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Ben felt that the hard, shining eyes were drilling into him. He looked back, keeping his face and hands still, feeling nervous, hoping it didn't show too much, feeling it was a nervousness he could handle.

The man said in a soft voice, "You look like your father. That's why I noticed you at the initiation."

Ben heard the fast, shallow breathing of his uncle. They stood like two schoolboys, waiting for Mr. Cost to dismiss them, or to ask them to sit down.

Mr. Cost had a drink in his hand, and he sipped it, watching Ben. "How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"Your father was a tiger. Did you know that."

Ben shook his head. "I didn't know him. He died when I was seven."

"He was a tiger . . . too much tiger, not enough fox. If he'd had more fox in him, he'd be alive today. Instead he's a corpse, shot down by a detective sergeant he never should have tangled with."

The man's thick pink lips twisted. "It isn't enough, just to be a tiger."

The houseboy coughed. Ben glanced round and saw a platter heaped with little sandwiches.

"Go ahead," said Mr. Cost.

Ben took one. His uncle said, in that tight voice, "Thanks. Not just now."

The fat man smiled down at the platter, and selected four little sandwiches, two in each hand, holding his glass between his thighs.

"Fix the gentlemen drinks, Harry. Then leave the bottles on the sideboard and go."

He sat back, and started to eat the sandwiches, watching Ben with his hard shining eyes. After finishing two sandwiches, he licked a bit of meat paste from one of his thick white fingers, and said, "Sit down."

Ben sat down in a chair near the couch, with his drink. Al started across the room to a small straight chair near the door.

"Sit closer, Al," said Mr. Cost. "Why are you so humble?"

Al's face went red. He mumbled something.

"You're not a tiger at all, are you, Al?"

"No, Mr. Cost."

"Well, so you're not. So you're a simple soldier. You're still in The Family, aren't you?"

"Sure."

"We're all in The Family. I happen to be a leader and you happen to be a simple soldier. So—that's life. You've never gone far but you've done your work and I honor you."

Al stared at him, his face flushed, his eyes shining.

"I honor you for a lifetime of loyal service . . . I hear you're hitting the bars a bit now, but I know that your wife died. I know it's been a hard year. Sit down here in this chair by your nephew."

Al came and sat down. He

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looked for a moment at the drink in his hand, then he breathed deeply and took two long swallows. The flush in his face faded but his eyes remained shining as he looked at Mr. Cost.

The fat man turned to Ben. "I personally picked you out. But it's just a hunch, a feeling. Maybe you'll be a leader, maybe you won't . . . What we do, we put those we pick for Specials to a trial. Those who pass, they go on. Those who don't, go back into the ranks."

Ben took a deep breath of the thin sweet air of the apartment. He'd pass any trial they set for him.

"A leader has to learn to carry out orders without question. Even if he can't see the reason. He has to believe that any order a superior gives him is for the good of The Family."

"I can see that."

Al said, "Any orders you give Ben, he'll carry out."

His voice was very earnest. Ben felt embarrassment for him—in his nervousness, Al had taken his drink too fast, and now his tongue was loose. Mr. Cost sat quietly, looking at him, his wide soft face without any expression at all.

Al said, "He's got this thing in him like you say, this tiger. He's a winner. I'm a loser, but I can recognize a winner."

Ben muttered, "Stop it, Al."

"It's all right," Mr. Cost said. "Go on, Al. I like to hear your opinion."

"Ben's a winner." Al nodded strongly. "He's going to go 'way up in The Family."

Mr. Cost shrugged. "Maybe he will. First he has to pass the trial."

"Any trial. He'll pass any trial."

Ben caught his uncle's eye, frowned, shook his head slightly. Al widened his eyes, then passed his hand over his mouth. He seemed to shrink back a little in his chair.

Mr. Cost said in his soft voice, "It's all right to talk, Al. This isn't like a public bar. There's nobody here you might be giving away any little secrets to."

"Secrets?"

"I like to hear you speak up for your nephew. You never spoke up for yourself."

"He has the stuff. I never did . . . What was that about secrets? I never gave away any secrets in my life."

The fat man smiled. "Don't look so worried. It was just a remark."

He looked down at his glass. Then he raised his eyes to Ben. "What were we talking about?"

"You were talking about orders. About carrying out orders."

"Yes. That's one of the most important things for one who wants to be a leader. Maybe the most important thing. If a man can't take orders, he can't give them."

Ben nodded.

"And it isn't always easy . . . Well, imagine a situation like this. Imagine somebody in authority in The

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Family, maybe I myself, saying to you that a condition has come up, that there's a possible danger to The Family. Take care of this condition—not bang-bang, you understand, but in a quiet way . . . Would you say, I don't like this, but it's an order, it has to be carried out—would you be able to say that?"

He sipped his drink, watching Ben over the rim. "You'd have to be able to say that. You'd have to feel that what a superior orders has to be done."

After a few moments Mr. Cost said, "You can see that, can't you?"

"I can see it," Ben said slowly.

"Good." Mr. Cost was smiling a little, as he watched him.

Ben said, "What do you mean, in a quiet way?"

"I mean, like it was an accident, like down a flight of stairs, or somebody stumbling onto the subway tracks . . . You know, the way it could happen to a person who had something of a history of being under the influence."

Ben stared at Mr. Cost, at his small twisted smile. Then he turned to his uncle. Al was frowning, his lips pursed and his eyes serious, as he tried to follow the conversation.

Ben said, "I haven't heard any order, have I?"

Mr. Cost shrugged.

Ben said, "Is this the trial?"

"You're the fox, if you are a fox. If you are, you'll know. If not, it doesn't matter."

"I don't get that."

"Well then, forget it. Have another drink and forget it. Someone else will do it."

"Do what?"

"I don't have to spell it out. Not if you have fox in you."

"I don't know what I have in me. Maybe I don't have anything in me."

"Maybe you don't. That's what we want to find out."

"Why?" said Ben. "Why does it have to be done?"

"Because we see a danger there." Mr. Cost's voice was suddenly cold and thin. "What are you doing, questioning me?"

Al said, "What's the matter? What's going on?"

"This is the trial then, is it?" Ben asked. "But why this? Why does it have to be this?"

"It has to be what I say it has to be . . . You may have a big future. I've got to know what you're made of."

"No." Ben shook his head. "Not this."

"So let it pass." Mr. Cost's voice was soft again. "Nobody's forcing you. Forget it. Have another drink before you go."

"Ben." Al leaned over, touched Ben's arm. "What's the matter with you? Listen to Mr. Cost."

"Shut up," Ben said.

"He doesn't mean it, Mr. Cost," said Al. "He's confused, a little nervous or something. He agrees with your point."

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The fat man twitched his shoulders. "It's up to him. If he feels he isn't the man to do it, someone else will do it, that's all."

Ben got up. He felt something tightening in his chest, making it hard for him to breathe. He said to his uncle, his voice hoarse, "Shut up. You don't know what this is all about."

"So why should I? I'm not a fox, I'm just a soldier. All I know, he's giving you some trial. So tell him you'll do it."

"Come on. Let's go."

"What's happened?" Al spread his hands. "I don't know what's happened . . . I'll talk to him, Mr. Cost. He'll come back and he'll explain."

"There isn't anything to explain. Everything's going to work out."

Ben stared at the fat man. "You think so?"

"A hunch, a feeling . . . I think you've got your father in you."

Ben was quiet, staring at him.

After a few moments, Mr. Cost dropped his eyes. "Come here, Al." His hand was in his pocket. "I want to give you something . . . I want to give you fifty dollars. I want you to go to a fine restaurant, get a fine meal, a fine bottle of wine. For once in your life . . . and wait, here's twenty dollars more. Get yourself a fine pair of shoes. Will you do that for me?"

Al looked at him, his mouth open. He held the money bunched in his hand.

"I want to do you this honor. And I want to do one more thing . . . Give me your hand."

The fat man took Al's hand in both his own, and put it to his lips.

Al said, his voice choked, "You shouldn't do that. You shouldn't do that."

"I honor you, Al."

Al stood there, his face working.

Ben took his arm. "Let's go."

His uncle turned to the door. He was rubbing his thumb gently over his hand, over the spot Mr. Cost had put his lips.

Mr. Cost sat there, looking after them with his flat, shining eyes.

In the elevator Al was still gently rubbing his hand.

"Why did he do that? Why?"

"Because he's crazy, that's why."

"Ben, what's the matter with you?" His uncle grabbed Ben's jacket. "You going to fail me? You going to throw this chance away? Why?"

Ben leaned against the padded leather wall of the cage, and closed his eyes.

His uncle said, "I don't know what happened in there, but whatever it was . . . think what this means! You got to think what it means—"

With his eyes closed, Ben said, "Did you like the air in there?"

"The air? Sure, it was fine. I mean, you could have stuff like that, air conditioning, an apartment like that . . ."

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"The air gets bad as you go down. You notice how bad the air gets as you go down?"

"The air? I don't know about air. You breathe it, you need it . . . What are you talking about, Ben?"

"I hate this dirty air down here," Ben said, as the door opened automatically at ground level. "I don't think I can live in air like this."

They stood waiting for a cab. Al said, "Ben—"

"All right. Don't worry about it."

"It's going to be all right?"

"Sure." Ben's voice was loud. "And you know what? We'll do like he said. Tonight we'll celebrate. We'll go to that fine restaurant and have that fine meal. And you know what? After the meal I'm going to honor you and kiss your hand."

His uncle didn't smile. Almost reverently he rubbed his thumb over his hand, where Mr. Cost had kissed it, and said in a serious voice, "I don't think you should joke. It was a solemn thing. He meant it."

"Sure he meant it. You're the old soldier, and tigers honor their old soldiers. We honor them the only way we know how."

Ben was laughing. But in the cab he started to cry. He looked at his uncle's cracked shoes and his worn cheap suit, and as his uncle stared at him in bewilderment, Ben put his face in his hands and cried.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 326th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an interesting "first story," brisk, semitough, and—not surprising these days—cynical . . .

The author, Jack Leavitt, is in his late thirties, married, and has two children. He has a B.A. from Brooklyn College, an LL.B. from the College of Law, University of Illinois, and an LL.M. from the School of Law, University of California. As a practicing attorney he knows what he's writing about—the main character in his "first story" is a lawyer. Mr. Leavitt was on active duty in the armed forces during 1951-54, has five campaign ribbons and two battle stars, and is a Lieutenant junior grade in the U.S. Naval Reserve.

He has written extensively for law reviews and journals—in such nonfiction areas as last wills and testaments, juries, sodomy, abortion, alcoholism, barbiturate poisoning, and blood types, including an article with the fascinating title of "The Funeral Director's Liability for Mental Anguish." Do you think we'll be receiving more legal fiction from Mr. Leavitt? You can bet on it!

TWO WOMEN TOO MANY

by JACK LEAVITT

FROM A CORNER OF THE PRISONER-interview cell, where he kept drumming his fingers on a dusty green table top, Howard Cummings stared at the Sheriff's deputies who trudged along the Alacosta County jailhouse corridor. What he expected to find I couldn't say. All I could see through the glassed slot in the locked steel door were their foreheads, eyebrows, and eyes, momentarily framed like flash cards in a quiz game—"Who Am I?" The deputies passed by with a professional indifference to what Cummings was telling me about the murder of his wife.

"You'd think I'm vicious." He slapped at the table and the sound jarred my nerves. About dawn, when my sleep was the heaviest, Cummings had reached me at home through my office-answering service. I had rushed to the jail-

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house, skipping my coffee and hurriedly throwing on the clothing I had tossed off a few hours earlier. The only delay was my wait for the jail elevator to tremble up to the sixth floor of the Hall of Justice, where I now faced a prisoner I had never previously met.

"God only knows what Marjorie told you about me," he continued. "And the police. They think they know it all. I haven't slept, I'm hung over, and nobody believes me."

Anxious for him to keep talking, I set down my legal pad and nodded. "You don't look vicious to me. What makes you think I've spoken to your wife? Or that I would believe what she said?"

"You were her lawyer, weren't you? Not for a divorce, I'd bet. That would be giving me what I wanted most. Was it separate maintenance? Getting rid of me without turning me loose?" Eyeing me with a mixture of contempt and fear, he slumped back in his chair, a pale young man of 27 who had razor scrapes across half his face and mucous clouding his eyes. We made quite a contrast. I was wearing a rust-colored sports coat with leather elbows and patch pockets, tan slacks and deerskin shoes. His clothier, the county Sheriff, was less fastidious. In blue-gray, jail-issue coveralls and mismatched cloth slippers Cummings looked like a typical first-time prisoner, bewildered, trapped by strangers, and afraid he would never again walk the city streets without handcuffs.

"I wouldn't be here if I had represented your wife," I told him. "Legal ethics are pretty strong. I wouldn't handle the case of someone accused of murdering a client—even when he was completely innocent, like you."

Shyly now, as though afraid I would trick him into a confession and then leap forward as a prosecuting attorney, he put his mind to work. At a sudden thought he reached for his trouser pocket. Only when he touched the unfamiliar coveralls did he remember that his own clothing was locked up with the police custodian. "I don't have your card with me," he apologized.

"That's all right," I laughed softly. "I have lots more. It's about the only way a lawyer can advertise."

"When I picked it up from the telephone table I was sure Marjorie was using you to destroy me. That's why I phoned you. She's dead and it's only fair that she gets a chance at me."

I stood up. "Please, Mr. Cummings! I've never even met your wife. Let's call it quits right now if you think I'm here to get revenge on you."

Rising slowly, he steepled his hands in front of him. "The police think I had your card so I could get help the minute I killed her. If I tell

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them where I found it they'll say I killed her to keep her from calling you. Please help me."

For a long moment we measured each other in silence. When he saw me beginning to sit down again, he sighed and leaned against the cell wall.

"Mr. Cummings, remember one thing about the practice of law. If I didn't have to spend money on stationery and paper clips I'd buy a yacht next Tuesday. And my cards aren't any good unless I give them away as fast as I can. You must be having an awful time here."

"They don't beat you any more," he said, folding into the chair. "Everybody knows that. Last night they just mopped out my cell and tossed a bucket of water over me. An accident. A simple accident." He grimaced as he remembered it, caught his breath and went on. "Is it called circumstantial evidence when nobody sees the crime but you're found in the room with the body?"

I stroked my chin, trying to appear like a gentle uncle. "Mr. Cummings, you'll go out of your mind if things like that bother you. Take it easy. Let me be the lawyer."

"They say it hurts at the end." He glared at me.

"Look." I shook my head reassuringly. "You're a long way from dying. Believe it or not, we've got more important things to worry about right now."

A guard looked through the slot and paused. I waved at him to show that I was safe, that I knew he was watching us, and that he could move along. He did.

"They're listening to everything I say!" Cummings backed farther into his corner, looking for a way out of the cubicle. For a moment he seemed ready to leap at the door and tear it down, then noticed his fidgeting hands. He tried steadying them but the tremor continued.

"You'll never believe this, but I ought to be holding up a test tube in front of my chemistry class today. I've never been this frightened."

Trying to pacify him I insisted, "Nobody enjoys being accused of murder. I'd be as upset as you are if someone said, 'You're it!' But I'd have sense enough to keep control of myself. C'mon now, Mr. Cummings. You're an intelligent man. Let's find out about last night."

He still couldn't face up to the pressure. Watching him was watching a man in agony. As he kept forcing himself to steady his hands, holding them firm, his eyes began to blink; as he squinted to calm his eyelids, his shoulders began to quiver.

"You don't have a cigarette, do you?"

Even before he finished asking me, he knew I didn't. When I offered him a candy drop he seemed ready to cry. I tapped on the steel door and waited. A guard's eyes filled the slot. Was he the guard of

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a few moments ago? I couldn't tell. Raising two fingers to my mouth I blew out imaginary smoke. The guard clicked the door open and thrust his head in. "You've got to get your own, counselor. We don't supply anything."

Cummings stood at attention, a quick student of jail etiquette. He stammered, "I've got a pack in my cell. They said I could keep it. Could I go back and get it?"

"No," the guard snapped.

"Officer, officer." I smiled at the haloed shadow in the doorway, outlined in gold by the corridor light behind him. "Doesn't Cummings have a property receipt in his cell for the personal belongings you took from him when he was booked?" Both Cummings and the deputy nodded. "That's the start of my fee. Why not be a good guy and carry a double load, the cigarettes for Cummings, the receipt for me"

Shaking a friendly fist at me he laughed, "At least you're an honest lawyer."

"Where else can you find one except in jail?" I laughed along with him. He pulled the steel door shut, locked it, and kicked it once to remind us it was solid. We heard his footsteps sounding down the corridor.

"I didn't mean to be so abrupt about the fee." I took a step toward Cummings. "But I knew you needed a smoke."

While waiting he took a candy drop and crunched it to bits. He guessed aloud, far too vividly, what the newspaper headlines and television reports were surely announcing throughout the city. Marjorie Cummings was dead: *Former Beauty Queen Strangled in Bedroom*. A long way from campus coronations she died nude in her own bed, her red hair trailing across her pillow, one hand reaching toward the bedside telephone.

Cummings himself had telephoned the police. "Sobbing uncontrollably," as the newspapers were bound to report, he insisted he found his wife dead when he arrived home at 2:00 a.m. The police, however, had noticed that Marjorie's clothing was neatly put away, that nothing seemed to have been taken from the home, and that the only disorder was the slight jumble that comes from ordinary living. Three times—as an exclusive for each television channel—a lieutenant stood slightly to Cummings' left and announced: "There were no signs of burglary or criminal assault. The victim apparently knew the killer and knew him well. The victim's husband has refused to account for his whereabouts at the time of the homicide."

After a short investigation, highlighted by Cummings' trying to sneak out of his home "to make a private phone call that he claims has nothing to do with this," the police booked him for murder.

"Two in the morning is pretty

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late if you had a chemistry lecture to give that day," I reminded him.

Cummings started to answer me. "There's something you don't know." He paused, trying to decide whether to trust me. Caution won out. He walked over to the door and looked toward the cell block. "I wish he'd get here with that butt."

"You're more worried about a cigarette than I am about my fee," I carefully baited him. "What's on that property receipt?"

Relieved that he could talk about harmless things he inventoried his possessions. "Sixty-two dollars in cash. Some credit cards. A check book—there's about seven hundred in the account. My car keys. A ring. Used to be my father's. And a watch. Needs cleaning."

A little more pressure would keep him from hysteria. "You know," I remarked, "that after a murder trial, even when you're acquitted, you'll be facing high level fees. You ought to get your money's worth by giving me all the cooperation you can."

"If I were the only one involved I wouldn't care," he mumbled. "You could have the whole damn account. Who needs it!"

"Forgive me, Mr. Cummings. Nobody can really afford the luxury of a homicide charge. That's not what you've been thinking of. Tell me about the woman."

"Huhhh," he stammered. He hurried toward me across the narrow cell, anxious for me to say, loud and clear, that he must have misunderstood me. I *couldn't* have mentioned a woman. *He* didn't! *He* didn't give her away! How could I have found out? Everything running through his mind was broadcast in his terrified face. Now was the time to have it out.

"You're protecting another woman, Mr. Cummings, or I've misread everything you've said and done. And I'm not that dense. Tell me about her. No one else will ever hear of it, I promise you."

Cummings surrendered with a word explosion. "She's two months' pregnant. A social-studies teacher at my high school. We're not sordid people. We love each other. For a year and a half we tried not to. The principal didn't know. He refused to transfer me. What could we do? Jeanne and I lived three blocks from each other. Every day we rode to school together and rode back together. We were on the same committees. She broke off her engagement. She's the loveliest person I've ever met. Not pretty. Not at all. Beautiful, to me."

Like the snap of a rifle bolt the lock of the door cracked open. The guard motioned Cummings against the wall, then took an authoritative step into the cell. One by one he dropped onto the table a pack of king-sized cigarettes, a folder of matches, and a yellow property receipt. "Okay, counselor," he announced. "You'd better be finished

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here in ten minutes or your friend goes without breakfast." He returned my salute and locked us in again.

Cummings was halfway through his cigarette and reaching for the next one before he paid any more attention to me. "Now that Marjorie's dead I hate to say everything was her fault," he said, more slowly now but more calmly. "Yet it was. In the beginning I did love her. We met on campus the night I received the Kirchoff award. That was seven years ago. She was always restless, but I kept hoping she'd change."

As he paused to inhale I rested my chin on my hands and signaled approval. We were just two alumni reminiscing about old times at good old alma mater.

"The arguments started early," he went on. "The making-up didn't help. Touching her got to be like window shopping. Everything wrapped in cellophane. Out of reach. It got so that she'd take off all her clothes, just the way the police found her, and walk around our home as though I weren't there. I'd try to get at her, wanting to please myself, hoping to please her. No response! Untouched by human hands! That beautiful woman—poisoned, somehow. I should have insisted on a psychiatrist then. But no matter how I make excuses I'll always realize why I didn't bring one in."

He became silent, in need of a friend. "Cavemen used to blame each other for earthquakes," I suggested. "Nowadays we blame ourselves for anything that goes wrong with other people. We're really not that powerful." This time I rapped the table for emphasis. He winced.

"I was afraid the psychiatrist would tell her *I* was to blame. He'd tell her I was half a man and it's no wonder she had turned frigid. Did you ever feel so inadequate you were terrified to ask anybody if it were true or not? Then she started telling me about *her* men. Can you picture it? A ravishing woman. Oh, she was! I never wanted anything as much as I wanted her. She'd slip away, then she'd point to me and laugh. Over and over. Like a machine.

"She started to bring men home while I was away. Strangers she'd meet anywhere in town. She'd tell me, step by step, how she'd tempt them. She was crude but—ah!—she was beautiful. Flattered, eager, passionate, they'd reach out for her. Then she'd laugh—the same way she laughed at me. She'd laugh and they'd realize they weren't the world's greatest lovers. They'd leave, furious at her, furious at themselves. I'm surprised she lived as long as she did.

"Find the right one of them and you'll find the one who strangled her. I would have killed her myself if Jeanne hadn't saved me. Dear Jeanne. What's going to happen to her?"

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"She's the one you tried to telephone, wasn't she?"

"Of course." He jiggled his cigarette so the smoke climbed erratically, like a ladder to the past. You'd think that with the right puff he could change what had happened last night. "I wanted her to know that I didn't kill Marjorie."

"Cummings, weren't you with her?"

He covered his eyes with his free hand. "No, I wasn't. That's why they've got me. No alibi."

"Then Marjorie *was* alive when you returned. What happened? Speak up, for heaven's sake!"

"Marjorie was dead, I tell you. Only I had left Jeanne much earlier that evening. We quarreled. Spitefully. She wanted me to marry her, but I couldn't. Unless Marjorie agreed to a Mexican divorce we had to wait a year. The baby would be born by then. Jeanne threw an ashtray at me. Look at the bruise." When he held out his hand I examined the purplish splotch on his left wrist. "The police saw it, too. For them it was just another mark against me." He pinched the bruise. It was real enough.

"What did you do after you left Jeanne?"

"Here's where you'll earn your money." Unexpectedly he became cynical. "You know what I did? What would *you* do if you had a wife you hated and a girl friend you loved—who was ready to tear your eyes out. No, you'd do the sensible thing, I guess. I didn't. I picked up a woman. My third woman. Three strikes and you're out!"

I took out a pen and began to write on the legal pad. "Check with—" The ballpoint jammed until I scribbled a few circles in the margin. "Give me her name—the third woman."

"She wouldn't tell me. She was drunk and I called her Marjorie. It was easy to remember."

I underlined my scribbles. "Damn it, where did you go with her? What did you do?"

"We did exactly what both of us wanted to do. In the back seat of my car in a parking lot. We smoked cigarettes and she left. I don't know where she went. Suppose she had her problems, too."

"You came right home after that?"

"That's when I found Marjorie—dead."

"Mr. Cummings," I underlined the underlining, "we're in trouble. We'll have to find this other Marjorie. She'd certainly be willing to save your life."

"She was out drinking because she was going to get her husband back from a hospital. All that was left of him. That's why she wouldn't give me her name. She'd never save me at her husband's expense." Cummings tried a half smile and quit.

Was he ready to be convinced? I

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hoped so. "You won't like this, Mr. Cummings, but I'm going to tell it to you anyhow. It might save your life."

"Go ahead," he urged.

Speaking softly I tried to make every word credible. "I'm sorry," I began apologetically. "I don't believe a jury will believe that Marjorie chased any stranger who happened to pass by. Too far-fetched. But I see something else, closer to home. Where she'd be proud of herself, ready to taunt someone who wasn't nearly as attractive as she was." Cummings became rigid, his mind racing ahead of my words.

"That's right, Mr. Cummings. What's the most natural thing for Jeanne to do after your first serious fight? She wanted that divorce! She'd go to your home and ring the bell. You weren't there. But Marjorie was. They'd talk for a while. Jeanne would plead fairness and decency. Marjorie, smug and silent, would ease her clothing off. 'Ha!' she'd finally laugh. 'Can you compare yourself to me!'

"Marjorie was right. Jeanne knew it. In a moment of hate she'd leap at Marjorie, fingers at her throat. Mr. Cummings, it's easy to strangle someone you hate. It's over before you realize it. Jeanne didn't know what to do next. She began straightening out the room, putting things where they belonged. When you didn't return she finally said to herself, 'It'll serve him right!'—and left. Forget about your strange men, Mr. Cummings. I've told you what must have happened."

Cummings' ashes had dropped onto his lap. He sat before me like a man already executed, like a man who wouldn't say a word in his own defense. Taking hold of his shoulder I pushed him firmly. "*Maybe* Jeanne will speak up and save you. My guess is that she'll deny everything."

Cummings swayed back and forth, speechless. Further discussion was useless. He had no one to trust but me—and I had crushed him. I tapped on the cell door again. As I waited I slipped the legal pad back into my brief case and put the yellow property receipt in my jacket pocket. The guard gestured me out like the majordomo at a formal ball. He snapped his fingers for another guard to escort Cummings back to the cell block.

"Take care," I called after Cummings. He walked away without any sign of having heard me.

The guard and I walked slowly to the doorway leading to the elevator passage. After unlocking the door he ushered me to the Visitors' Ledger, resting on a walnut table. No other attorneys had come to the jail since my arrival and it was too early for family visitors and friends, so my name was still the only one on the page. I scribbled my initials and the correct time under "Out" and waited for the guard to press the remote

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button that would open the barred door between me and the elevator. I kept waiting.

When I glared at the guard he pointed to the floor under the ledger table. I looked and saw a yellow slip—Cummings' property receipt. I reached into my jacket pocket and poked around. Hmmm! The hand-stitched threads had pulled loose between the lower edge of the patch pocket and the jacket itself, leaving a wide hole. What high prices we pay for third-rate products! Sooner or later, anything I put in my pocket would have fallen through.

That was how my business card must have slipped down to the telephone table as I was strangling Mrs. Cummings. That was how Cummings got my name. A simple explanation—a careless tailor! Now I would have to make two stops before returning to the office. First, to the property room to pick up Cummings' valuables. Then to a five-and-dime for a needle and thread. Perhaps a thimble, too. I'd hate to injure my fingers.

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the first DOVER novelet by

JOYCE PORTER

Have you made the acquaintance of Detective Chief Inspector Wilfred Dover? Of course you have—in DOVER ONE, DOVER TWO, DOVER THREE, *or* DOVER AND THE UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL . . . *Dover is not the usual type of detective—not at all the larger-than-life, infallible, omniscient, and likable hero. Although a professional from Scotland Yard, Dover is sometimes the reluctant sleuth, and often the bumbling bloodhound, if not the downright incompetent investigator. He is no ball of fire in action, being generally sedentary or actually recumbent, and is always more interested in food and drink than in clues. Irascible, abusive, boorish, rude and crude, Dover is referred to by his publisher as "abominable." You may dislike him, or loathe him as much as Sergeant MacGregor does, but you will have to admit he's a character, and as human as they come; and if some of his solutions have an element of the "miraculous" in them, they are often hilarious and invariably entertaining . . .*

DOVER PULLS A RABBIT

by JOYCE PORTER

"GOOD MORNING, MRS. DOVER." Detective Sergeant MacGregor raised his hat. He was a very polite as well as a very elegant young man. "Is the Chief Inspector ready?"

Mrs. Dover shrank farther back behind her front door and smiled apologetically. "Well, not exactly ready, Sergeant. Your call was a bit unexpected, you know. He was counting on having his day off today."

"It is a murder case," MacGregor pointed out gently.

"Oh, yes,"—Mrs. Dover wrapped her flowered housecoat closer round her and wished she'd had time to take her curlers out—"I understand. The point is, *he* doesn't. You know what he's like." She glanced nervously over her shoulder and lowered her voice. "He's been going on something terrible ever since you phoned."

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Sergeant MacGregor contented himself with a vague smile. One hardly liked to discuss one's superior officer with one's superior officer's wife. Especially when one's superior officer might appear at any moment and catch one.

"He took senna pods last night," explained Mrs. Dover in a whisper. "You know—seeing as how he was going to have his rest day today."

"Oh, dear," said MacGregor.

"He didn't expect to have to go out, you see," Mrs. Dover went on. "He's in the bathroom now."

MacGregor was beginning to feel chilly, partly with foreboding and partly with standing in the cold morning air. "Do you think he'll be long?"

Mrs. Dover shrugged. "I don't really know."

A door slammed heavily upstairs and shook the entire house. Footsteps crashed down the stairs and the unlovely figure of Detective Chief Inspector Dover hove into view.

Mrs. Dover cowered even farther back. "Is everything all right, Wilf?"

Chief Inspector Dover grabbed his bowler hat off the hall stand. "No, ith isn'th!" He tore his overcoat off its hook. "Ith's all your faulth!"

"Oh, Wilf!" wailed Mrs. Dover.

"Don'th you 'oh, Wilf' me!" snapped her husband, winding a disgusting-looking brown woolly scarf round his neck and scowling ferociously. "Whose sthupid idea was ith, eh? You and your ruddy senna pods!" For the first time he deigned to acknowledge the presence of his sergeant. "How long a drive have we goth?"

"About an hour, sir," MacGregor told him, and started a diplomatic withdrawal down the steps.

"'Strewth!" groaned Dover. He set off after MacGregor.

"But, Wilf!" Mrs. Dover poked out a restraining hand.

"Whath is ith now? Can'th you see I'm in a hurry?"

His wife's voice was hoarse with embarrassment. "It's your teeth, Wilf. You've forgotten to put your teeth in, dear."

The trip took an hour and a half. Dover and MacGregor, equally apprehensive, spent the whole time sitting on the edge of their seats in the back of the car and spotting public conveniences.

Before long they were clear of London and its civilized amenities. MacGregor found himself looking at the countryside with new eyes. Would that clump of trees do? Could the 240-pound Chief Inspector scramble up that high bank to find a refuge behind the hedge?

"Not much further now, sir," said MacGregor, doggedly looking on the bright side. "We've just picked up the motorcyclist who's going to guide us for the last bit."

There was an ominous grunt from Dover.

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"We'll be there in a couple of minutes, sir," said MacGregor, consulting his map feverishly. "We don't have to go right into the village." He braced himself against the dead weight of Dover as the car took a sharp turn off the main road.

"Damned inconsiderate!" snarled Dover.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Who's gone and got himself croaked, anyhow?"

"A Miss Clarice Ebbitt, sir."

"A woman!" sniffed Dover. "I might have guessed it. Selfish bitch."

The police car, following the motorcyclist, roared at top speed up a narrow country lane. Gravel flew as they screamed to a halt outside a decrepit-looking, isolated cottage.

Dover clutched his middle. For once in his life he didn't wait for somebody else to open the car door for him. Overcoat flapping, he thundered up the garden path and stumbled clumsily over a pile of sacking which was cluttering up the open doorway.

Inside the cottage a uniformed Inspector and several plainclothesmen looked up from their various tasks.

"Where is it?" Bellowed Dover, his usually pasty face now an alarming dark red.

The Inspector paused irresolutely in mid-salute. "Er—well, I'm afraid you're—well—sort of standing on it, sir," he said unhappily, and let his hand drop.

Dover spared half a glance for the obstruction under his feet. "Not the corpse, you moron!" he yelled in distress. "The lavatory! Where is it?"

The Inspector paled. "The lavatory, sir?"

"Oh, get out of my way!" howled Dover, and barged through to the back of the house. He found a flight of stairs, and panting heavily, made a hasty ascent.

Meanwhile, back in the sitting room, MacGregor and the Inspector regarded each other in bleak silence.

MacGregor cleared his throat and introduced himself.

The Inspector acknowledged this with a thoughtful nod. "And I'm Inspector Slegge from the local police. My Chief Constable instructed me to give you every assistance."

"That's kind of you, sir."

A series of sounds came from the floor above.

"I think," MacGregor suggested tactfully, "it might be a good idea if your chaps waited outside for a bit."

Inspector Slegge agreed at once. No need to let the lower ranks see Homer nodding. He sent the plainclothesmen out. "And that's your Superintendent from the Murder Squad, is it?" he asked with a glance at the ceiling.

"Well, Chief Inspector, actually, sir."

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"Really?" Inspector Slegge's eyebrows rose. "I thought they were all Superintendents that they sent out from the Yard."

"Well, Chief Inspector Dover is a bit of an exception, really, sir."

"Is that so?" said Inspector Slegge with truly admirable restraint.

For the second time that morning MacGregor's pink ears caught the slam of a bathroom door and the heavy trample of his lord and master's feet along the landing and down the stairs.

Dover crowded his unwieldly bulk into the tiny sitting room. "'Strewth, it's a bit parky in here, isn't it? Let's have that door closed."

"We didn't want to move the corpse until you arrived, sir," explained Inspector Slegge stiffly.

"Well, I have arrived—haven't I?—so get it shifted! No, shove it *outside,* you fool! I don't want to sit with a blooming dead body round my feet, even if you do. And, MacGregor,"—from long practise Dover selected the most comfortable chair in the room and pushed it nearer the hearth—"scout around for some firewood and get this fire going. They're bound to have some at the back somewhere. Oh, and if you come across the kitchen in your travels, get the kettle on. I could do with a cup of tea. It'll help settle my stomach. And," he called to his sergeant's retreating back, "a few biscuits or a piece of cake wouldn't come amiss, either."

With that settled, Dover removed his bowler and was on the point of depositing it on a small table. "Here,"—he peered accusingly at the polished top—"this is blooming dusty, isn't it?"

"It's the fingerprint powder, sir," explained Inspector Slegge.

"Got a handkerchief, laddie?"

"Er—yes, of course, sir."

"Well, what are you waiting for, then?"

In a remarkably short time Dover got himself comfortably established in the sitting room of Delphinium Cottage. He sat, fair and square, before a nicely glowing fire with a steaming hot cup of tea clutched in one pudgy fist and three cream biscuits in the other. He beamed contentedly at his two associates.

"Right," he said. "Now, let's get on with it! I haven't got all day to waste on one crummy murder."

With a tactfully suppressed sigh Inspector Slegge got out his notebook. It provided a convenient excuse for not looking at Dover making a complete pig of himself.

"The victim, sir," he began, "is a Miss Clarice Ebbitt—"

"I know that!" snapped Dover. "How was she killed?"

"Head bashed in, sir, with that brass candlestick over there." Slegge indicated the object lying on a sheet of newspaper on the window sill. "It's all covered with blood and hair."

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"Fingerprints?" asked Dover, dribbling soggy tea-soaked biscuits down the front of his overcoat.

"We're checking now, sir. My chap found a few and photographed them, of course, but they didn't look very hopeful—too old and smudgy and not in the right place if you were using it as a weapon."

"How old was she, this Miss Rabbit?" Dover passed his cup to MacGregor for a refill.

"Ebbitt, sir," Inspector Slegge corrected him unwisely.

"That's what I said!" glowered Dover.

"Well, I suppose she was about fifty, sir."

"Live alone?"

"No, sir, she resided here with another lady, a Miss Jennifer Willoughby."

"Where's she?"

"She's at the cottage next door, sir, recovering from the shock."

"She found the body, did she?"

"Well, not exactly, sir. I'm not absolutely sure from my preliminary inquiries which one of 'em was actually first on the scene. Not that I think it's all that—"

"Right," Dover cut in; he was beginning to find Inspector Slegge a bit of a bore. "Let's have her in and see what she's got to say for herself. Any more tea in that pot, MacGregor?"

Miss Jennifer Willoughby was a prettyish woman of about 35. She was white-faced and still shivering with cold and shock as she sank gratefully into the chair MacGregor pulled up for her. Although it was now after eleven in the morning she was still wearing a dressing gown and slippers and had a gray blanket wrapped round her shoulders.

Dover took one jaundiced look and didn't reckon he was going to have much trouble with her. He turned on his most hectoring tone. "How long have you and this Miss Rabbit been living here?"

"Ebbitt," said Miss Willoughby faintly. "About eight or nine years, I suppose."

"And what did you quarrel about?"

"Quarrel? We didn't quarrel about anything."

"Aw, come off it!" sneered Dover. "Two women living together for nine years and you didn't quarrel about anything?"

"No, really. We got on very well together. Poor Clarice was older than me, of course, but we were always the very best of friends, I do assure you. My being out at work most days helped, I suppose. We weren't always on top of each other, if you see what I mean." She glanced somewhat timidly at MacGregor, who was writing all this down. "I work at the public library in Chuddington."

"Nearest town," explained Inspector Slegge. "About five miles away. Frequent bus service."

"That's right," agreed Miss Wil-

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loughby. "I usually catch the eight twenty-five at the bottom of the lane. That gets me to work in very nice time."

"Did this Miss Rabbit go out to work?" demanded Dover, undoing the buttons of his overcoat as the heat from the fire grew fiercer.

"Oh, no. She had a small annuity, you see. She stayed at home and looked after the cottage. Naturally we shared all the household expenses."

"All right," said Dover impatiently, "let's get to this blooming murder. What happened?"

"Well, I heard all these dreadful screams and I came rushing downstairs and there she was, lying all huddled up in the doorway and covered with blood and—" She broke off with a choked sob and groped in the pocket of her dressing gown for a handkerchief.

Dover regarded her with distaste. He couldn't stomach these sniveling witnesses who got their stories all jumbled up and gave him the trouble of sorting them out.

"What time was all this?"

"About seven o'clock, I think. I remember glancing at my alarm clock and seeing that it said five past seven. I always keep it a few minutes fast."

"You were still in bed?"

"Oh, yes. We never get up before half-past seven. That's why I was so confused at first, you see. I went rushing into Clarice's room because, naturally, that's where I thought she would be. I imagined she must be having a nightmare or something. Then I tried the kitchen. It was only after that I came running in here."

Dover wiped the sweat off his forehead, closed his eyes, and laboriously thought this out.

"Normally," he said after a bit, "you both stayed in bed till half-past seven?"

"Oh, yes. That gave me plenty of time to get dressed, have my breakfast, and catch my bus."

"But this Miss Rabbit was up before half-past seven this morning. Why?"

"I don't know," moaned Miss Willoughby, starting to weep again.

Dover turned to Inspector Slegge. "Any signs of breaking in?"

"No, sir, none at all. All the windows are securely locked and the back door's fastened with a lock, heavy bolts top and bottom, and a chain. This front door's equipped the same way, sir, although of course that was wide-open."

"Poor Clarice was very nervous," said Miss Willoughby, "living out here in the country and all these dreadful things you read about in the papers. And tramps, you know. I did want her to get a dog, but she didn't like dogs. They do bring a lot of dirt into a house, one must admit, but even so—"

"If," said Dover, ruthlessly stemming the flow of Miss Willoughby's whining voice, "nobody broke in,

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then this Miss Rabbit must have opened the front door herself, mustn't she?"

"Unless Miss Willoughby did," said MacGregor, who felt under an obligation to prevent Dover from cutting too many corners.

"Well, she didn't!" snapped Dover. "She's already said she was in bed, hasn't she? That door was locked last night as usual, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes," Miss Willoughby nodded emphatically. "I always locked the whole house up every night—that was my little chore—and then, when she'd washed up the supper things and made the cocoa, Clarice would go round and check it again. Last night was the same as usual."

"Hm." Dover let his eyelids droop again. It was really getting very hot by the fire.

MacGregor thought it might be a suitable moment to stick his oar in. "Did somebody knock at the door?"

Miss Willoughby jumped a little at the sound of this new voice putting the question, and looked at MacGregor uncertainly. "I don't think so."

Inspector Slegge leaned forward. "But you would have heard a knock, wouldn't you? After all, your bedroom is upstairs, isn't it? Right over the front door? And Miss Ebbitt's room is downstairs, opposite the kitchen and at the back of the house?"

"Well, poor Clarice was a very light sleeper," said Miss Willoughby.

A piece of coal fell in the hearth and Dover came to with a start. "Yes," he said, for all the world as though he hadn't dozed off for a minute. "Well now, when you found this Miss Rabbit as dead as a duck in the open door, did you see or hear anybody else?"

"No. Only Mr. Lurgan from the cottage next door."

"Lurgan?" repeated Dover crossly. "Who's Lurgan?" He glared accusingly at MacGregor and Inspector Slegge. "Nobody's told me anything about anybody called Lurgan."

"He's waiting in his cottage, sir," Inspector Slegge hastened to explain, quite forgetting whose fault it was that Dover knew next to nothing about the case. "I told him you'd be wanting to see him."

"Yes," said Dover doubtfully. He was loath to leave the comfort of his chair by the fire, but the rumbles in his stomach couldn't be ignored. "Well, after lunch, eh? I reckon we've done enough for one morning."

Inspector Slegge's firm, closely shaven jaw dropped slightly. "But, sir, it's only a quarter to twelve!" Dover's bottom lip pouted out in a way which should have been a warning. "And Lurgan's missed half a day's work already, sir, and they're very busy on the farm. I promised him faithfully he could

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go in this afternoon. If you could just see him now, sir, I'm sure it wouldn't take more than a couple of minutes."

"God help you if it does!" growled Dover.

Miss Willoughby gazed sadly at the empty tin of her favorite biscuits. "Have you finished with me now?" she asked.

"For the moment," said Dover, still aggrieved at being forced to work what he considered overtime.

"Well, do you think I could go back upstairs and get dressed? It's not very nice, being in my night clothes with all these policemen about the place. And it's not very warm, either."

"No," said Dover, happy to be awkward, "you can't. I haven't completed my examination of the premises yet and I don't want you mucking everything up."

Miss Willoughby, her ladylike protests falling on deaf ears, was sent back to the next-door cottage and Fred Lurgan summoned to take her place.

Fred Lurgan was a strapping, rosy-cheeked young fellow with a cheerful nature which not even Dover's sullen presence could dampen.

"I was just coming out of the front gate," he told them, "when I heard all these blood-curdling screams, see. Just gone seven, it'd be. I was on me way to work. Well, for the moment I couldn't think what it was or where the dickens it was coming from. Had me right flummoxed, it did. Didn't sound like a rabbit or a hare or anything, and then I bethought meself of this place. So, I come running as fast as I could make it."

"How long do you think it was between hearing the screams and getting to the cottage here?" asked MacGregor after a sidelong glance to see if Dover had got over his sulks yet.

"Oh, not more'n a couple of minutes at the very outside. We're not more than a hundred yards down the lane. Soon as I turned in at the gate I saw her, of course. Miss Ebbitt, that is. Lying right across the threshold of the front door with Miss Willoughby just coming into the sitting room from the back of the house. Terrible state she was in. I dunno what had got her most bothered—Miss Ebbitt getting her head bashed in or me seeing her in her nightie." He chuckled good-humoredly. "Right couple of old maids, they are. Run a mile if they see a pair of trousers, God alone knows why!"

"So you and Miss Willoughby arrived on the scene at more or less the same time, then?" mused MacGregor.

"Seems like it, mister. I had a quick look to see if there was anything I could do, but she was as dead as a doornail, poor old thing. Well, I didn't like leaving Miss Willoughby all alone, see, so I took her straight back to our place and then

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I got me bike out and went down to the village to get the policeman. That was right, wasn't it? I didn't touch anything. Hardly set foot in here, really."

"When you first heard the screams," said MacGregor, "could you actually see this cottage from where you were standing?"

"Oh, no. It's round the bend in the road from us, you see, and there's all those trees in between as well. I couldn't actually see this cottage till I got to the garden gate, like."

"And you didn't see anybody running away? Or hear footsteps on the road? Or the sound of a car?"

"Not a damned thing. If he'd come out into the lane, though, you'd have thought I'd have heard him at least, wouldn't you? Specially if he was running."

"Could he have been hiding somewhere?"

"Well, not in this front garden, that's for sure. You couldn't miss a field mouse there, it's that small. He might have slipped through to the back, I suppose."

"No," Inspector Slegge put in efficiently, "the gate through to the back is locked from the other side and that fence is six or seven feet high. He'd have had a job climbing over that before Lurgan came on the scene."

"Could he have got off the lane somehow?" MacGregor tried again. "Into one of the fields, perhaps?"

Fred Lurgan shook his head. "We've got these high banks, see, and they've just finished the hedging only this week. Filled up all the gaps, see. Of course, you could break your way through, but that'd take time and make the devil of a noise. Once I got round the bend in the lane I'd a clear view for half a mile down to the main road. I wasn't what you might call looking for anybody, of course, but I reckon any movement'd have caught me eye."

Dover showed signs of returning to life. The three men waited for the oracle to speak.

"Anybody got a cigarette?" asked Dover through an enormous yawn.

MacGregor counted silently up to ten and offered his cigarette case.

Dover blew the smoke out with a deep sigh. "You on pretty friendly terms with these two women, eh?"

When Fred Lurgan finally caught on that this question was being addressed to him, his face broke into a big grin. "Well, I'd hardly call it that, sir. They keep themselves very much to themselves, they do. Shirl—that's my missus—she's tried to be neighborly, but you could see with half an eye that they weren't a bit keen, specially Miss Ebbitt. Mind you, I reckon they're as poor as church mice and proud with it, if you follow me. Didn't want to accept any hospitality that they might have had a bit of a struggle

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to pay back, like. Well, you've only got to look round here, haven't you? They haven't even got a telly."

"Did anybody ever come visiting?" asked Dover, looking for once mildly interested in the answer.

"Nary a soul, sir, as far as I know—apart from the milkman and such-like which you'd hardly count. We've been living next door for five years now, and I don't reckon they've ever had anybody in here for so much as a cup of tea. Oh, the vicar called once, I think, but he never got across the front doorstep, I'll be bound."

"They aren't churchgoers, then?" asked Dover, finally conceding defeat and moving his chair six inches back from the fire.

"No. Well, nobody is in the village, see, except for people who work on the estate and they don't have much choice, do they? Seeing as how old Mrs. Leatherside's the patron of the living. Very High Church, she is, and scared by a curate in her youth, they do say. So the upshot is the parson's always got to be a bachelor and the services are enough to make you turn in your grave. My old granddad says they're burning that incense stuff and ringing bells—well, people don't like it, not round here they don't. If they go anywhere, they go to the Chapel and you can't blame 'em, can you?"

But Fred Lurgan had lost Dover a long way back. The Chief Inspector's bird-brain was now fully occupied with wondering what it fancied for its supper.

"Have you seen any tramps about, Lurgan?" asked Inspector Slegge. His already low opinion of Scotland Yard was being reinforced every minute. Why, damn it, that fat lump hadn't done a blessed thing since he'd arrived except swill tea and shove biscuits down his throat!

"Tramps?" Fred Lurgan shook his head. "No, I've not seen any about lately and I've not heard of any, either. Besides, what'd a tramp do this for? Even allowing that he'd be daft enough to come round on the scrounge at seven o'clock in the morning. Nothing's been stolen, has it?"

"No escaped prisoners or lunatics in the neighborhood?" MacGregor looked questioningly at Inspector Slegge.

Another negative shake of the head.

"'Course," said Fred Lurgan dubiously, "I suppose if he was pretty fast on his feet and wearing soft-soled shoes, he could have made it to Donkey Lane before I got round the bend."

"Donkey Lane?"

"A footpath off to the right," explained Inspector Slegge crisply, making a determined effort to stop staring so rudely at the somnolent Chief Inspector, "between here and the main road. You'd pass it as you came in. It runs down the hill past

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the church to the village. That's right, Lurgan, isn't it?"

"By foot it's the quickest way to the village," agreed Lurgan, "but it's as muddy as all hell. You'd be up to your ankles in it this time of year. Besides," he frowned, "would a fellow who's just committed a murder run towards the village? I should think he'd have headed for the open country somewhere, away from people, like."

Dover blew suddenly down his nose, and everybody jumped. "This Miss Willoughby," he said, "you say you took her back to your cottage?"

"That's right, sir."

"Did you let her go back upstairs first?"

"Oh, no. She was as near passing out as makes no difference, so I just put me arm round her and helped her straightway over to our place."

"Did you go upstairs yourself?"

Lurgan shook his head. These coppers took a long time to catch on, and no mistake. He'd already told 'em all this once. "I didn't come no further than the middle of this sitting room, and that was just to catch Miss Willoughby before she hit the floor."

MacGregor's ears pricked up. "Ah, I see what you're getting at, sir," he said eagerly. "You mean that the murderer could have escaped into the rear of the house and concealed himself there until Lurgan and Miss Willoughby had gone?"

"I don't mean anything of the sort!" roared Dover. "And don't you start fathering your crackpot notions on me! How could he have concealed himself in an undersized chicken coop like this with Miss Willoughby coming down the stairs and looking all round the place for her friend? Why don't you try keeping your ears open and your trap shut for a change?"

MacGregor lapsed into an offended silence. Dover turned his attention to Inspector Slegge. "You —how much mucking about did you let your lot do before I got here?"

"Well, I'd hardly call it mucking about, sir," Inspector Slegge retorted with some indignation. "I hope that, after all my years in the force, I know—"

"How much?" repeated Dover.

"Well," Inspector Slegge thought carefully, "the village constable looked into every room as soon as he got here, just to make sure that there was nobody hiding. He assured me that he did no more than just stand in the doorways and look. Then I arrived with the police surgeon and the C.I.D. team. We'd only just started on the routine examination of this room when you came, sir."

"Did any of your men go upstairs?"

"No, sir, though I myself had a quick glance round to ascertain the layout. Naturally I didn't touch a single thing."

"Humph!" Dover slumped

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moodily back in his chair. "Well, what time is it?"

"Half-past twelve, sir," said MacGregor.

"Lunch," said Dover firmly. He glared at Fred Lurgan. "If I want you again, I'll send for you. Meanwhile,"—the admonition was accompanied by a fearsome scowl—"keep your lip buttoned!"

Lunch turned out to be only a qualified success. Inspector Slegge, erroneously assuming that the great detective from Scotland Yard would be too engrossed in his investigations to wish to interrupt them by a trip to a nearby hostelry, had persuaded his wife to pack a picnic hamper. Dover was furious. A lunch consisting of nothing but hot oxtail soup from a thermos bottle, pork pies, cold chicken, ham, tongue, hard-boiled eggs, home-made bread and farm butter, apple pie, cheese, and four bottles of beer each was not, as he kept on remarking, the sort of hospitality he expected from those local police forces lucky enough to acquire his services. Grumbling and complaining through every mouthful, he shoveled the lion's share of the goodies down his maw while MacGregor and Inspector Slegge looked rather wistfully on.

By half-past one Dover was flat out in his chair again. The gobbling and guzzling had mercifully ceased and he was now at peace with the world. He stuck his legs out, undid his top trouser button to relieve the pressure, and let the comfortable warmth of the fire play on his distended stomach.

"What happens now?" Inspector Slegge asked in hushed and mystified awe.

"We get an hour's peace and quiet—if we're lucky," replied MacGregor nastily, "before he wakes up in a stinking temper and remembers that he's no nearer solving the case than he was before he left home this morning."

"He's a bit of a one, isn't he?"

"He's a pig!" retorted MacGregor. "It's the same with every job we go on. He never does a damned thing! I'm the one who's got to do all the work."

"He's certainly not much of a one for sticking to the book," observed Inspector Slegge, not knowing whether to admire or condemn.

"Sticking to the book? That lazy old slob hasn't even read the book! Talk about not having a clue—he wouldn't recognize one if you shoved it up his snout. Look, while he's having his nap, I think we'd better discuss what we've got so far and plan our future actions. If we don't do something, this is just going to be one more in the long list of Chief Inspector Dover's unsolved cases. Keep your voice down, though, because we don't want the old fool waking up. Now, as I see it, we've got three possibilities: one, Miss Willoughby did it; two, Lurgan did it; three, some passing stranger did it."

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"Well, my money's on Lurgan. I can't see Miss Ebbitt opening the door to a complete stranger at that time in the morning, but she'd trust Lurgan. He could spin her some cock-and-bull story and she'd open up and let him in. We've only got his word for it that he was outside his cottage when he heard the screams. And look how clever he's been about saying he didn't see anybody running away! He's been very careful not to commit himself to anything we might possibly be able to check."

"Motive?" asked MacGregor doubtfully.

"Oh, robbery, I should think. Don't forget he was the one who was so keen to impress us that there was nothing here worth stealing. How do we know? Miss Ebbitt might have had a fortune hidden away under her mattress."

"Well, possibly." MacGregor spoke without much enthusiasm.

"Or, of course," Inspector Slegge added primly, "it could be one of those sex crimes. You know what some of these country people are like."

"I think it's Miss Willoughby, myself," said MacGregor. "I can't understand why, if Lurgan or anybody else came knocking at the door, she didn't hear it. And then there's the murder weapon—that came from inside the house. Lurgan would have brought something with him, wouldn't he? He'd never have relied on having to get inside this room to pick up that candlestick when he could have hit her with a hammer or something as soon as she opened the door. My theory is that Miss Willoughby woke Miss Ebbitt up and lured her down here. Maybe she even persuaded her to open the front door. Then, when her back was turned, she struck her down with the candlestick. If it was Miss Willoughby, you see, she'd have heard Lurgan dashing up to see what all the screaming was, and she'd have had time to get to the hall door before he actually arrived on the scene."

"But what's her motive?"

"Well, as my esteemed Chief Inspector said, two women living together could have had a quarrel about practically anything, couldn't they? Even a man, eh? Or maybe Miss Ebbitt isn't as poor as all that and she's left all her money to Miss Willoughby. We'll have to check, of course, but there's bound to be something."

"What about the passing stranger theory?" asked Inspector Slegge.

"The passing stranger?" MacGregor pursed his lips. "I don't think so. An innocent Miss Willoughby would have heard the knock on the door. An innocent Lurgan would surely have seen somebody running away. Either way it seems to rule out the passing stranger theory. By the way, we must check the distance Lurgan had to cover after he heard the

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screams. It might tell us something. What I'd really like to do is get hold of some of your chaps and do a reconstruction of the crime."

"My chaps'd be delighted. They've been kicking their heels outside all morning, you know." Slegge stole a glance at Dover.

"All the same," MacGregor mused, "I still can't see Miss Ebbitt letting a total stranger into the house, especially when she was in her nightie. She'd have left the chain on, at the very least."

"Well, I can't see Miss Willoughby smashing her friend's head in with a brass candlestick, either," objected Inspector Slegge. "She just isn't the type. My guess is that Miss Ebbitt was the sort of tough, masculine one in the partnership. She was a big strapping woman with quite a pronounced mustache."

MacGregor snapped his notebook shut. "What it really boils down to is that, as of this moment and thanks to Sleeping Beauty there, we just haven't enough solid factual information to go on. What we need to do now is go over this cottage and the area surrounding it in a proper scientific manner. I wonder," he sighed disconsolately, "if I could persuade the old fool to let me do it. Talk about being past it—they ought to have put him out to pasture years ago. Or shot him."

A loud belch came from the chair by the fire. "Clues!" snorted Dover, half to himself. "Reconstruction of the crime! Scientific investigation! 'Strewth!" Dover opened his beady little eyes and glowered accusingly at his juniors: "Sitting there nattering away like a couple of old women over the back fence!"

"We were just trying to clarify our minds, sir," explained MacGregor stiffly, "and plan the next steps in the investigation."

Dover contented himself with rolling his eyes dramatically up to the ceiling as if seeking sympathy and understanding for his burdens. Then he gave one of his enormous yawns and scratched his head. Inspector Slegge watched fascinated as the dandruff flaked down onto the shoulders of the great man's overcoat.

Dover yawned again. "No need for you to go busting a gut with thinking," he observed with a marked lack of charity. "I've already solved the case."

MacGregor's heart sank. When Dover got bored with a case, he had a distressing tendency to close his eyes and, figuratively speaking, stick a pin in the list of possible suspects. MacGregor had no doubt that this was what had happened now. Dover couldn't possibly have solved a problem about which he, MacGregor, was still in the dark.

"But, sir," he wailed, "you can't have solved it! I mean, we haven't even done anything yet."

"Done enough for me," was Dover's rejoinder. One of his chief

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pleasures in life was baiting his snooty young sergeant. "Or for anybody else with a ha'p'orth of brains."

Inspector Slegge was open-mouthed. Had he been wrong? Was this really a Master Mind after all? "You actually know who killed Miss Ebbitt, sir?"

"Good as," said Dover.

MacGregor relaxed slightly. "Perhaps you could explain your theory, sir?"

Dover was offended. "It's no bloomin' theory," he grumbled. "It's just a question of putting a name to the one who did it."

MacGregor relaxed still more. Quite clearly Dover had as little idea as anybody else who the guilty party was. He was just trying to be clever. "Inspector Slegge and I," he began rather patronizingly, "were discussing the idea of some stranger being responsible, sir, but we have discounted it. Miss Ebbitt, you see, sir, would never have opened —"

"Of course she wouldn't," agreed Dover unexpectedly. "No need to, was there? The murderer was already inside the house."

Inspector Slegge was disappointed. "You think it was Miss Willoughby, then, sir?"

Dover turned on him irately. "Why don't you wash your ears out?" he demanded. "I've just told you I don't *know* who it is, haven't I?"

"But Miss Willoughby was the only other person in the cottage, sir," said MacGregor. Then a horrible thought struck him. "You surely don't think it was suicide, do you, sir?"

"Suicide?" Dover's face crinkled in disgust. "How could it possibly be suicide, you blockhead? 'Strewth, if that's an example of what they call detection these days —roll on, crime!"

MacGregor took a deep breath. "You said the murderer was someone inside the house, sir. Only Miss Willoughby and the deceased were inside the house."

"That's what you think!" sneered Dover. "There was somebody else."

"Really, sir?"

"Yes, really, you young pup! And don't you take that hoity-toity, looking-down-your nose tone with me, laddie, or you'll wake up wondering what hit you! If you'll just shut up for a couple of minutes I'll explain the whole thing to you in words of one syllable."

Dover's promised elucidation, however, was destined to die unuttered on his lips. Just as he was demanding another of MacGregor's cigarettes as his price for revealing all, there was a hesitant tap on the front door. On a nod from Dover, Inspector Slegge opened it. A tall lank clergyman in biretta and cassock stepped gingerly into the sitting room.

"Oh—ah—is Miss Willoughby here? The police constable outside suggested that I should—ah . . .

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I don't—ah—want to disturb you gentlemen but I would like a word —"

"Who the blazes are you?" demanded Dover.

The clergyman looked at the person who had addressed him so abruptly, blinked, and looked again. Few people could believe their eyes when they saw Dover for the first time. "I'm—ah—Father Potsford, the incumbent of St. Hilda's in the village."

"Wadderyer want to see the Willoughby woman for?"

"Well, I heard of the—ah—tragedy and I thought it my duty to come along and offer what—ah—spiritual comfort I could."

Dover frowned. "Wafor?"

"I—ah— beg your pardon?"

"This Willoughby woman doesn't attend your church, does she?"

Father Potsford was rapidly acquiring a hunted look. "No, she—ah—doesn't actually, but of course my pastoral care covers everybody living within the boundaries of my parish. Strictly speaking, it doesn't matter which church people belong to, or—ah—indeed, if they attend none at all. Besides," he added before Dover could get in with a comment, "I think I can—ah—count Miss Willoughby as a personal acquaintance. She has been most helpful to me in my—ah—researches at the public library. I am in the —ah—process of writing a little work on the Anglo-Catholic tradition at St. Hilda's and—"

"Come by bicycle?" asked Dover abruptly.

Father Potsford blinked again, then looked down at his feet. "Ah," he said with a fatuous grin, "the bicycle clips! I suppose my cassock doesn't quite cover the bottom of my trousers. Most—ah—observant."

Dover ignored the compliment and turned to MacGregor. "That's him!"

"Sir?"

"The murderer, you fool! He's the one that snuffed out your Miss Rabbit."

MacGregor had had many embarrassing experiences with Dover, but this threatened to be the worst. Frantically he sought for something to say or do which would get them out of the mess that the Chief Inspector's outrageous pronouncement had dropped them into. Father Potsford might look more than a bit of a fool, but the clergy are notoriously sensitive about being accused of murder, especially in front of witnesses. Could Dover's injudicious accusation be laughed off as some sort of gruesome joke? MacGregor's blood ran cold as he imagined what his superiors would say if they ever heard about it. Or the Sunday papers—

Meanwhile Dover, as cool as a cucumber and behaving as though he was still in his right mind, was tackling Father Potsford. "You might just as well come clean," he told him. "The Willoughby woman's given us a full confession."

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"I don't believe it!" bleated Father Potsford, backing away as far as he could in the tiny room.

"Suit yourself," said Dover with massive indifference, and began exploring his left ear with his little finger.

"Sir!" MacGregor hurried to the fireside chair and whispered urgently in Dover's other ear. "Don't you think Father Potsford had better wait outside for a moment while we talk this over? We can't just make wild accusations like this without any evidence. There'll be the most frightful row."

Dover looked at his sergeant with acute distaste. "Row? Who's going to kick up a row? That baaing ninny's as guilty as sin. If he doesn't get a move on and confess pretty damn quick, I'll thump the living daylights out of him!" So saying, Dover clenched one beefy fist and waved it threateningly.

MacGregor played his last card. "How about a nice cup of tea, sir?"

"Afterwards," said Dover, and rose ponderously.

But Father Potsford had got over the initial shock and was rallying. "I don't know what this is all about," he proclaimed indignantly. "I demand an—ah—explanation of this terrible accusation!"

Dover scowled. He thoroughly disapproved of people who insisted on putting up a fight. "I'll give you an explanation, mate!" he bellowed. "What about you and your popsie for a start, eh?"

"My—ah—*popsie?*" gabbled Father Potsford. "How dare you make slanderous accusations—"

"Oh, shut up," snapped Dover. "Don't start coming the innocent with me! You and Miss Willoughby spent last night together upstairs in her bedroom, you don't deny that, do you? At seven o'clock this morning you pussyfooted downstairs and this Miss Rabbit caught you red-handed. Whereupon you picked up the nearest available weapon and clobbered her with it."

To MacGregor's intense amazement and everlasting chagrin Father Potsford crumpled without warning and sat down heavily on a convenient chair. "Do you think I could have a glass of water?" he asked pathetically.

MacGregor stared at him in horror. "You didn't really kill Miss Ebbitt, did you?"

Father Potsford sighed and dashed all MacGregor's dearest hopes. "I'm afraid so. In the heat of the moment I did—ah—strike the woman. She wouldn't let go of me, you see, and she was making the most dreadful—ah—accusations, threatening to expose me to my bishop. I fear I lost my head. All I could think of was getting away, you see. I grabbed the—ah—candlestick and struck her. I just wanted to make her let go of me, that's all. I never meant to kill her." He looked up. "I've been on my knees all morning, praying for the repose of her immortal soul."

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"That's nice of you," scoffed Dover, returning to his chair. "Well, now you've started, you might as well spit the rest out." He didn't hold with things like cautions and informing suspects of their rights under the law.

Luckily MacGregor did, and the formalities required by the Judges' Rules were carefully observed before Father Potsford was allowed to complete his sordid little story.

He and Miss Willoughby had met and fallen in love in the public library at Chuddington. Marriage, or even the announcement of an engagement, would have meant the immediate loss of his parish. "Mrs. Leatherside, my patron, would have quite—ah—simply thrown me out, neck and crop," he explained as MacGregor's pencil raced over the pages of his notebook and Dover closed his eyes to rest them. "She just doesn't hold with married priests. Miss Willoughby was also worried about the reactions of her—ah—friend, Miss Ebbitt. We both needed a little time to set our affairs in order, so we decided to wait until I had secured another position.

"Regrettably our—ah—passion proved too strong for us. It was so difficult for us to meet anywhere. Both Miss Ebbitt and my—ah—housekeeper are women of extraordinarily suspicious natures. Then Miss Willoughby had this idea. The woman—ah—tempted me and I fell." Father Potsford shook his head over the wickedness of the female sex.

"Every Thursday night Miss Ebbitt took a bath before retiring to bed. A week ago, while her friend was thus engaged in her ablutions, Miss Willoughby surreptitiously let me into the cottage and—ah—up to her room. Oh, that I should ever have been such a reckless fool! In the morning I let myself quietly out before Miss Ebbitt was awake. As soon as her alarm clock went off, at half-past seven, Miss Willoughby hurried downstairs and on the pretext of getting the milk in, concealed the—ah—fact that the front door was unlocked. On this first occasion everything went most smoothly." He gave a deep sigh.

"Last night we—ah—repeated our little deception. But this time, as I crept down the stairs, I found Miss Ebbitt waiting for me at the bottom. Somehow we must have aroused her suspicions. What happened then I have already—ah—told you." He covered his eyes with his hand. "I opened the front door—she was still clinging to me—and rushed out. My bicycle was concealed in the hedge by the garden gate. I mounted it and rode away."

"See?" Dover broke in smugly. "A bicycle! That's why Lurgan didn't see or hear anybody on the road. Silent and swift. Get it?"

MacGregor repressed a desire to wipe the smirk of triumph off Dover's face. It was aggravating

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enough to have the Chief Inspector actually solve a case, but it was positively unbearable not to be able for the life of him to see how he'd done it. While Inspector Slegge busied himself with getting the now maudlin Father Potsford bundled off to the police station, MacGregor wracked his brains. What could Dover have spotted? Could it all have been pure guesswork? Had he hit the bull's-eye by sheer chance?

MacGregor carried the tea tray into the sitting room once again and found Dover girding his loins to repeat his bully act with Miss Willoughby. The Chief Inspector restored his energies with a pot of tea and another of MacGregor's cigarettes. "Fifteen minutes," he instructed Inspector Slegge sternly, "and not a second sooner. Then wheel her in."

"Yes, sir!" Inspector Slegge was practically groveling. What a genius this fellow was! It just showed that you could never judge by appearances. Inspector Slegge threw Dover a cracking salute and marched off to stand guard over Miss Willoughby.

But MacGregor went straight to the point. "How on earth, sir, did you know it was Father Potsford?"

It wasn't often that Dover got the chance to put one over on Clever-Boots MacGregor. "Oh, simple deduction, laddie," he said airily. "It was all pretty obvious, really. I'm surprised," he added maliciously, "that a bright boy like you didn't work it out before I did."

"But what started you off, sir?" insisted MacGregor, still hoping against hope that the whole thing was a fluke.

Dover chuckled. It was quite funny, really, when you came to think of it.

"The seat," he said.

"The seat, sir?"

"Remember that as soon as I arrived here I had to go upstairs to the bathroom? Well, the seat there was *up*."

No enlightenment dawned across MacGregor's handsome features.

"Oh, come on, laddie! You're not as prim and proper as all that! A house with two women in it—why should the lavatory seat be *up*?"

MacGregor was aghast. "And from *that* you deduced Miss Willoughby had a lover, sir?"

"Well, not at first," Dover admitted with spurious modesty. "I merely deduced that there'd been a man in the bathroom. Then I found out from the evidence of the witnesses that there couldn't—or at least shouldn't—have been."

"But, sir, there could have been a hundred explanations for the—er—seat being in that position."

"Could have been," agreed Dover with infuriating reasonableness, "but there weren't. Once you know there's been a man kicking around, the rest follows logically, doesn't it? Miss Willoughby—she's the young-

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er one in the twosome—she goes out to work and she sleeps upstairs. So she must have known about the man up there. But she wasn't murdered, was she? Add it all up, and it means that Miss Willoughby has a boy friend staying the night, and the jealous Miss Rabbit catches him. Bingo!"

"Well, yes," said MacGregor unwillingly. There was something cockeyed somewhere. He only wished he could spot what it was. "But—Father Potsford?"

"Why did the boy friend kill Miss Rabbit? Because he didn't want it to get around that he was having a tumble with Miss Willoughby. That means he'd got some sort of position to protect, doesn't it? Well, when I'm handed an unmarried parson who'll get the boot if he so much as touches a woman, I don't have to sweat about it any more, do I? Especially when he returns to the scene of the crime on a bicycle. They do that, you know."

"I don't follow, sir."

"Murderers, you fool! They always return to the scene of the crime. 'Strewth, call yourself a detective and you didn't even know that?"

MacGregor let it pass. If Dover believed that, then he'd believe anything.

"I'm surprised," Dover continued, gleefully rubbing it in, "that you didn't think about the murderer getting away on a bicycle. He rode down this Donkey Lane, you see, right back to his vicarage. Lurgan said that lane led to the church."

"I seem to have been rather dense about this whole thing, sir," MacGregor admitted miserably. "Though, to be perfectly frank, I really don't see how—"

"Senna pods," said Dover with a perfectly serious face. "I owe it all to senna pods. You ought to try them yourself sometime, laddie. It might sharpen you up a bit."

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Captain Devlin, past fifty, had thirty years of service on the force. He and Mae had raised seven kids, five of them daughters, and now the oldest girl was going to be married the next day to a first-grade detective. So Captain Devlin had two things to do—buy a wedding gift and finish off a night's work . . . a human interest cop story that will put your heart in your mouth . . .

JUST A NIGHT'S WORK

by WILLIAM FAY

"IF YOU REALLY MUST KNOW," SAID Devlin's wife, "a girl could do worse than marry a smart young cop. She could hang around here the rest of her life and listen to an old complaining one."

"Like me, I suppose?"

"Exactly like you, Georgie, dear; so don't keep sticking your chin out," Mae advised him. "Hand me the hammer."

Devlin, the captain of police, got up from his chair and gave her the hammer, aware that he should have been more useful at this time and less concerned with prideful matters of his own, as well as with that feeling of foreboding, very likely groundless, that had been plaguing him since he had heard about Rico Alvarez. The hell with Rico Alvarez, he decided.

"Is it hanging straight?" Mae said.

"Your slip, dear? No, it is hanging crooked."

"The curtain, you idiot!"

"The curtain, yes," said Devlin softly; "it looks like a veil for a queen."

She was three rungs up the step-ladder, with her mouth full of nails and her hair in a knot, and today, after twenty-five years of living with him, she was still the best-looking woman in the house. He told her this now, while holding the ladder, knowing well that she never got tired of hearing it. He had a talent for being close to her that was the joy of his life and the one true tonic for the tired days that become more frequent when a cop has passed his fiftieth year.

"You'll roast in purgatory for your lies," Mae said.

"So I won't be alone."

He remained standing there by the big open window on the second floor of his own house, looking out on a gray, soiled, uptown street that had known more stylish times. He didn't mind it too much, because the years had murdered any preten-

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sions the Devlins might have owned at the beginning. He had acquired the old and narrow brownstone house by assuming its mortgage from a bank in '32, when a sergeant's pay looked like a sweepstakes ticket that you cashed in twice a month.

"It's a hell of a fine place for a weddin' party," Devlin said, "if it's good for nothing else."

He felt it was one of the Lord's more spectacular miracles that a man like himself, having raised seven kids, could still possess a house of his own in the center of New York—never mind the weight of the current mortgage or the scars on the old neighborhood. He wasn't fool enough, with five daughters and a pair of sons, to call himself an impoverished man. He only wished he had the price of an impressive present for the bride.

It was June now, the month of church bells, falling rice and rented swallowtail coats, so that the daylight lingered long, long after supper. The geranium looked healthy in its pot. A stickball game competed with the traffic in the street and you could smell the summer's conquest of the city like a sugared dream or like a deadening drug—he wasn't sure which one. But gazing a little farther down the street, he could see the smart boys gathered outside the Hotel Paradise, a fancy trap on a corner of Broadway, in the Seventies. Trouble? he thought, and then he answered the problem as he wanted it to be answered! They wouldn't dare.

"Here comes the bridegroom," Devlin said, more gaily. "With his hat in his hand and his head in a cloud. What kind of tricks am I supposed to do at the church rehearsal?"

"You're supposed to act like a grown man and the father of the bride," Mae said, "so you'll learn what you have to do tomorrow. And you might apologize while you're there to Father Zymanski for having missed all the other rehearsals."

"I was workin'," Devlin protested, "and I'll do no apologizin'."

"Then wear a necktie," Mae suggested, "and try to have your shirt inside your pants. You'll be told what to do when you get there."

"You're very funny," he said. He was a uniformed cop in his working hours, with gold on his chest and style in his walk, no matter how tired he was. Off duty, on a summer night, he felt entitled to look exlaxed.

"Go on down now, and no smart jokes," Mae said. "I told the girls to buy some cake. I'll have the coffee made when the pack of you come back."

Devlin put on a tie and a jacket. The bridal party was gathered downstairs in the front room where the gifts were on display. There was an overflow of young detectives, including the bewildered groom, four ushers, and Eddie

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Pfeiffer, who was going to be best man. They had all been to F.B.I. school, these gleaming examples of modern law enforcement, and they were examining the gifts with profound laboratory interest. Devlin had to be careful not to make any bright remarks about the four identical electric toasters or the three electric mixers, as alike as police on dress parade. He wasn't sure who had given them to Mary and Joe. Mae knew, of course, but Devlin kept forgetting.

"Hello, Pop."

"Mary, darlin'," he said.

She kissed him because she hadn't been home to supper. She had been hastening at last-minute chores, and this accounted for the beads of perspiration on her nose. Her hair was damp and her eyes were shining. She was happy enough to be in serious pain, he realized. She was a big girl, like her mother, with the bloom on her now, if ever it would be.

Of course, all of Devlin's daughters were big. They were like a generation of handsome mares—as he had once remarked, to his own regret—from Janice, the youngest, who was twelve, to the bride herself, who was twenty-four. Devlin looked from one tall daughter to another with devouring pride, from Janice, to Anne, to Martha, to Kate, then to Mary, holding right now to Joe Deegan's arm.

"We'll fill up the church like a circus ring," Devlin said. "I think we'd better break step when we march inside or the floor is apt to collapse . . . It's your last chance, Joe. It's run or be doomed."

The bridegroom smiled, but he didn't say anything. Devlin liked the boy and approved of him. He had nothing whatever against young Deegan, unless it was that as a first-grade detective, at this dewy age, he was already earning the equivalent of a uniformed captain's pay. He was a tidy, well-dressed man, about thirty years old, as tall as his bride if he took a deep breath and his shoes had just been heeled. He had a new lightweight suit that was handsome on his frame, yet for a detective, first grade, he wore a dazed and helpless look.

Around the station house, at times, animated by some special case, Joe Deegan could talk until your ear was bent like a dried apricot. It was just that love didn't rest very lightly on Joe at the moment. It consumed him, as it should the truly pledged. You saw him standing here, wordless, with that lollipop smile, and you couldn't conceive this was the man who had bounced Rico Alvarez all over the lobby of the Hotel Paradise only a couple of hours ago.

"The poor guy is numb all over," Eddie Pfeiffer said, looking at Joe. "I guess I know when I'm well off."

Devlin walked down the street with Pfeiffer, in advance of the others. A hushed respect seemed to at-

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tend their mass appearance. Only a few of the loiterers, candy-bright in their summer clothes, who customarily stood under the marquee of the Hotel Paradise, were present now. These few were tight-lipped, watchful, no doubt thinking of Rico Alvarez.

"How was it this afternoon?" Devlin said. "What kind of a job did Joe really do on Rico?"

"I wasn't there," Eddie Pfeiffer said, "but I understand it was classic. I got my own account of it from the dame at the cigar stand inside the lobby."

"You mean Joe rubbed it in, don't you?"

"That's what they tell me, George. Right in front of Rico's own crowd and his most important clients—a big bookmaker from the Bronx, Georgie Kelly from Brooklyn, Vito Scarpiano from Queens—all important clients and friends of his—in having a few free drinks with Rico to celebrate his getting out of jail. It seems Rico was in the lobby, buying a handful of cigars, when he saw Joe walk by, going to your house."

"What pulled the string on it, Eddie? What did Rico say that set Joe off like a crazy man?"

"Rico knew about the wedding, that's all. He was feeling real smart and full of himself, and he passed a few remarks."

"What remarks?"

"Well, he did say something about the bride's old man, for one thing, George—after all, you're the guy that clapped him away for three years. Then he said—Well, you won't like it."

"I've been a cop for thirty years, Eddie. I've heard everything, and this I'm entitled to know."

"It wasn't a nice thing, George. I'm warning you. It was something about Mary and future generations of cops—that's when Joe flew off the rule book. Are you satisfied?"

Eddie Pfeiffer stopped talking then, and Devlin withheld his answer because the Broadway traffic was heavy against them and they had to stand on the curb long enough for the others to catch up. The light changed and they moved again. Devlin spoke his own heart's sentiments through his tightened teeth.

"Well, of course," Eddie said. "What else?"

"Joe didn't book the bum on disorderly conduct."

"Naturally not, George. It was a personal thing. Himself and Rico. He doesn't even want Mary to know it happened."

"He should have taken him in," Devlin said. "If he had to paste Rico around like that—and I'm agreeing with you he was entitled to—well, then he should have put him under lock and key."

"Why?"

"Because I know Rico Alvarez a whole lot better than you fellows do—and I know how his type can be when they're fresh out of jail. I did-

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n't have to take any special course with the F.B.I. to learn that much. He needs about thirty days to cool off."

"All right," Eddie said. "Forget it."

They were together now, the whole big group, and the parish church was in front of them, on the west side of Broadway. It was an old Gothic structure, sand-blasted to shimmering cleanliness, with a fine spire of its own, yet dwarfed, if not belittled, by the commercial buildings that had risen on each side.

Father Zymanski was waiting in the vestibule. "Evening, Captain," the priest said. "Is this a pinch? Or official business?"

"Just a girl I know, father," Devlin said. "She might need a few extra prayers. She wants to marry a cop."

They went inside and the organist was present for the last rehearsal; at no extra charge, it was explained, but as a favor to Father Zymanski—to give the whole big group of them the feel of how it would be tomorrow; to help, most of all, their pacing up the aisle; to make it seem real and convincing now, so they'd remember it. It all went very well.

Devlin marched in slow procession with his oldest daughter holding his arm. I get so awful sentimental, he was thinking. I get so stupid when there's beautiful music mixed up with the people I happen to love. He couldn't help it. His eyes were moist. The traditional bars from Lohengrin kept coming out of the old pipes in the loft of the church. The candlelight on the high front altar flickered and flared and swam in his sight.

He bit his lips. Now, steady, Devlin, all the way; you've got four daughters left; you'll walk a mile like this before you're through.

He glanced once at Mary, who pressed his hand. The girl wasn't nervous at all. She walked as though it were all ordained—the work and the worry, the children she'd have, the careful budgets shattered by a hundred unpredicted things, the mending of clothes and the price of shoes, the light-and-gas man at the door: "I wonder, ma'am, if you didn't overlook this statement from the company; it's $16.29" —his own fine daughter who could have married a plumbing contractor, as Devlin well knew, or a doctor from the Bronx.

Now, as the ushers took their places by the first four pews, he could see Joe Deegan standing, waiting, with Eddie Pfeiffer beside him. One look at Joe's face and you knew then it could not have been the doctor or the plumber. Not in this world or the next. Devlin, faithful to the precise performance of the rehearsal, missed no step of the solemn procedure, gave his daughter to the young man of her choice.

God knows he's in a trance, thought Devlin, and in no condi-

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tion to watch out for himself, if he had to.

Then Devlin stepped aside as he had been told, remembering to enter the first pew on his left. He sighed and took out his handkerchief and carefully blew his nose. He looked once more at the bridegroom. I'm satisfied, he thought.

Devlin didn't return home with the rest of them for coffee and cake. For one thing, he didn't want to parade again among the wedding gifts, when he had not so much as purchased a doormat for the bride's new home. All the money he had been able to save or borrow had been securely set aside by his wife to pay the Fishkin Brothers, caterers.

I could walk up to Schlemmer's, he thought, and get some kind of thing on credit. Schlemmer's was a gift, antique, and call-it-what-you-want kind of shop on Columbus Avenue. I never put the bite on Schlemmer before; there isn't any reason why he couldn't wait until pay day.

The other item on his mind was Rico Alvarez, but as for Rico—well, it was more likely Devlin's nerves than his reasoning that made him so apprehensive.

It was a long block east to Columbus Avenue.

"Look. I'm not used to a cop apologizing to me," Mr. Schlemmer said. "If you still owe me by Christmas, George, I guarantee not to sue. Usually it's a stink they want to make about I've got too many crates on the sidewalk. Who mentioned money?"

"I mentioned money," Devlin said. "I always talk about it when I'm fresh out of it."

"What are you smiling about?" said Schlemmer.

"I like it," George said. "The damned thing's beautiful."

It was a china clock, somewhat older than Herman Schlemmer, who was half the age of New York. It was full of hand-painted roses and porcelain twirls that looked like whipped cream squirted on a cake. A gold door opened below the face of the clock and out came a lady in a Nineteenth Century gown, pursued by a soldier in a blue uniform, who certainly looked like a cop.

"That's it," said Devlin. He almost felt giddy when he examined its detail. "It couldn't be anything else."

"I'll wrap it for you," Mr. Schlemmer said.

"Put about six pounds of straw around it, Herman. And maybe cardboard too. I wouldn't want anything to happen to it."

"You're going right home, aren't you?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I did expect to make one stop."

He hadn't hoped for cooperation at the Hotel Paradise. The one unrivaled feature of the house was the unfailing, twenty-four-hour discretion of its staff. It was that kind of

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place—a humming hive of hoodlums, yet a sanctuary, too, because it was the policy of the Paradise to be exaggeratedly legal at all times.

"I didn't know you without your uniform, Captain," the night clerk said very politely. "Can I help you?"

"You can ring Rico Alvarez. Push down the key on seven-oh-five."

"Mr. Alvarez isn't with us this evening."

"I didn't expect he would be, but push the key down, anyhow. You mind?"

The night clerk went over to the switchboard and pressed the proper key. He smiled while he was doing it. "It goes buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz; it gets monotonous, Captain."

"All right, let go of it," Devlin said. "Just don't be coy."

The cigar stand, he had noted, was already closed up for the night. The clock in the lobby said 10:15.

"You look very summery without your uniform, Captain," the night clerk said.

"Thank you," said Devlin, "and I've got a ventilated head if I waste any more time talking to you."

He hadn't expected Rico to be here. Rico at the moment would not have any appetite for facing the friends and acquaintances among whom he had always remained unchallenged. Rico, by his very nature, would have sought a place to brood.

Never mind what Eddie Pfeiffer said. I'd like him in jail, Devlin decided; I'd feel better with Rico in jail.

He walked, clock and all, from the lobby into the bar. They called this part of the Hotel Paradise, the Adam and Eve Room, which was real cute, Devlin thought, because there was never any shortage of serpents. A pair of fashionable thieves stood at one end of the bar, and they smelled like a six-dollar visit to the barber, even at this distance. They were masters of the frozen attitude and they displayed no interest whatever when Devlin placed the large box on the bar.

"A bottle of beer, Frank," Devlin said.

He put down thirty-five cents and felt like a real splashy spender, knowing you could get it on draught, for fifteen cents, back on Columbus Avenue. The bartender's name was Fullam. He was as skinny as a lemon stick inside his starched white shirt, but he was neat, precise, and good at his trade. Devlin knew him somewhat better than Fullam, in his present place of employment, might be willing to admit. The two thieves took their drinks to a table, looking back all the while.

Devlin said, almost inaudibly, "Tell me all about this afternoon, Frank. You were here. I know you were here."

Fullam said nothing. He went over and wiped the bar where the other patrons had been. They had

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carried their brandies with them, but had left the water glasses. Fullam picked these up deftly and flipped an odd eighty cents of gratuity into an old-fashioned glass by the register. In the stillness that followed, you could suddenly hear the metronomic ticking of the clock. Fullam backed away from it.

"If it's goin' to explode," he said. "Let me pour some water on it now." His belligerent tone was strong enough to carry. "The damn thing ticks."

"It's a clock," Devlin said. "It's entitled to tick. Forty minutes from now you'll even hear chimes."

"The man says it's a clock," Fullam announced. "He says in forty minutes we'll hear the chimes." He gathered more glasses and put them in one of the twin sinks under the bar. "You know I can't talk here, George," Fullam said in a voice greatly reduced.

Devlin was hunched over his beer. "Let the water run in the sink," he said. "I'm the nice man that got one of your nephews paroled and another one a job in the city playgrounds. I'm the same nice man that can climb over the bar and put your head under a faucet if I have to. How was Rico after it happened?"

"He was out of his mind," Fullam stated simply. "Isn't that what you wanted to know?"

"Was he drinking?"

"No."

Now the hot water ran into both sinks and the steam came up like a pair of ghosts. Fullam washed a dozen glasses in new suds, then rinsed them in clear water.

"What'd Rico say?"

"Mostly he was shriekin'."

"What's the worst thing he shrieked?"

"The worst thing he said, for your purposes, George, was 'I will kill the rat,' and other things he called Deegan, like he meant it, but you know that's not a guarantee. That's talk, because his pals were here; he had to say something."

"He wasn't drinking after Joe clobbered him?"

"He was a lemonade man all the way. After he got slapped around —well, liquor wouldn't have helped him. You know how it is with Rico, don't you?"

"I think I do," said Devlin solemnly.

"Whiskey isn't what gives him wings when things get bad for him. At least it wasn't before he went to jail. Make what you want of it, George."

"I'll make what I want of it," Devlin said. "I'm goin' to throw him in the can, for security's sake, if I have to invent a new law. Did you see any sign of Rico being on the junk?"

"All I saw I've told you, George. I can't keep washin' glasses that aren't dirty. They'll know you're pumpin' me."

"Where's Rico now?"

"I don't know. He changed his

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clothes, then he left at a quarter of six. He didn't say nothin', but he did look crazy. With the wrong kind of stuff he could spoil that weddin'. Maybe thirty days for Rico wouldn't do him any harm. That's from me to you, with thanks from both my nephews."

"You're not through yet," Devlin said. "You can still do better. Who was with Rico? Who was waitin' for him when he left?"

"Freddie Ames," Fullam said very softly. "The little guy that works for him. He was waitin' outside in the car."

"Now I think you've done your very best," said Devlin.

Devlin knew where Freddie Ames lived. He had been very tired when he got there, but he was more tired now. He was hungry and he kept remembering the food and coffee he had foregone. His feet hurt and his eyes blinked heavily against the strong light of an unshaded lamp.

"Let's get on with it, Freddie," Devlin said, but Freddie was not responding. He talked in spurts, then lapsed into determined silences. Freddie had to be primed, and the process was slow.

"Think again, Freddie. I've been here an hour. You and I are growing old together because your memory's so bad."

"Lay off me. I want to sleep. I told you already I was on duty sixty hours."

"Ever since Rico got out of jail?"

"That's what I told you. From the moment he got sprung until I left him on Broadway, three hours ago. I haven't seen him since."

Freddie Ames was a man in his forties. He was no bigger than a starving jockey standing in a hole. His shirt was off because Devlin had torn it in an earlier scramble to examine Freddie's arms. Rico Alvarez's chauffeur and general flunky—whether the boss was in or out of jail—sat chicken-fleshed in the mild night breeze that came through the window. His arms were free of any recent puncture marks.

"It's my apartment," Freddie complained. "I pay the rent. You don't have a warrant to come in."

"I know," Devlin said. "Except you're a liar about having left Rico three hours ago. You'd have been asleep when I got here. For the last time, Freddie, where did you really leave Rico?"

"I told you nine times already!"

Now Devlin moved forward and picked the small man up in his arms. He slapped him once, not wanting to, but because he thought it might help. Devlin felt no hatred for criminals that even remotely matched his persistence in giving them trouble. Other cops, including some young first-grade detectives felt that his softness with certain hoodlums was a deficiency. Devlin didn't think about it much. He was watching for reactions from Freddie.

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He raised his hand again, but didn't use it. The response was plainly fear. The hate was small. This was no Rico Alvarez. Freddie Ames was beginning to fold. One little concession now, Devlin decided—one bit of bait for a frightened, practical man.

"I'll help you, Freddie," Devlin said. "You won't get hurt this way."

"I don't know anything."

"All right then. Let's suppose you don't know anything, but just the same—tonight, let's say—Joe Deegan has an accident. How high do you think we'll hang you as an accessory, Freddie? Who drove Rico away from the hotel? That's curtains, Freddie, I can tell you. Try it my way. Take my word for it that Rico won't know a thing."

Devlin lit a cigarette and waited. The clock on the floor tick-tick-ticked through all its protective wrappings. Freddie Ames looked at it, dry-lipped, apprehensive, not trusting the box that had chimed like a church some time before and shrunk the scalp on his head. The small man was thinking, chewing his lip, weighing the odds of the practical chance. He looked up.

"Rico's at his cousin's flat—alone. The third floor. One-twenty-eight West. You know the street. The one above yours. You'll help me, Devlin?"

"If you need help, it's a promise."

"Rico's waitin' for junk, I think, because I heard him on the phone with Greggy Forbes."

As a police job, Devlin knew, this wasn't orthodox procedure. A man in his right mind doesn't carry a yard-high, quietly ticking, sometimes melodious package in his arms when he's in hope of making an arrest.

One-twenty-eight was a house much like his own, but converted to four-family use. There was a vestibule with name plates, mail slots, and a stubbornly latched inner door.

"Can I help you, mister?"

Devlin had been watching the man in the blue shirt and the white suspenders who had come from the basement and was climbing the steps from the street.

"You're the janitor?"

"The superintendent, mister." And when Devlin showed him his badge, he said, "There's trouble?"

"I want to go to the third floor," Devlin said. "A relative of Suarez," he added. "Open up for me, will you? Another thing: are you an honest superintendent?"

"I don't have to answer that. Why?"

"Because I want you to hold this package till I come down. It's important that nothing happens to it."

"What's in the package?"

"A new parkin' meter. The small size. Hold it careful, so the dimes don't fall out."

"I don't want any trouble."

Devlin had gone ahead. He moved carefully on the first steep flight of stairs. His weight had multiplied on his legs since he had left

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the parish church. His breath was heavy. I'm old, he thought.

A grimy fifteen-watt bulb cast a feeble light on the worn, shredded carpet of the second floor. Devlin, from long experience, reached up and killed the light by twisting the bulb in his hand. He heard a door open above him—slowly, prudently, but on hinges that squeaked. Then he heard the voices, low, not carrying the full depth of the stairs, yet identifiable by accent and by tone. He reached for his gun.

One man began descending the stairs. "Where the hell is the light?" he complained.

"The stupid janitor," Rico said. "That's all it is. Go ahead."

"I don't like to go down with no light."

But Greggy Forbes came down, while Devlin waited, sweating in the dark. Thirty years on the job had never made this easy. His heart began to pound and he could feel the pressure in his ears. He reached then, when it was time, and put the gun against Greggy, who gasped.

"Don't move at all," Devlin said softly. "Move a little bit, a tiny bit, and you're dead, Greggy." He reached up with his left hand, twisting the warm bulb back to fitful life. "Higher, Greggy. Higher with your arms."

"I got nothin' on me—nothin'," the junkman said.

"We'll go upstairs then, and we'll see if you came empty-handed."

Devlin pushed Greggy Forbes ahead of him toward the final set of stairs and the flickering light above them. He could not see Rico but suddenly he heard him.

"Greggy?" Rico said in his high, thin voice. "You alone there?"

Devlin held his breath and tightened his grip on the man who shielded him.

"Come out nicely, Rico," he said. "Come out quiet. A little trip to the station house. No lumps on your head. I don't want to kill you, Rico."

There was no answer.

"Lemme go, Devlin," Greggy begged aloud. "The guy's full of snuff. I don't want to go up."

"It's a short trip, Greggy."

The narcotics peddler folded on the stairs. He went to his knees and clung to the steps. Devlin hit him once with the gun, then stepped awkwardly over him as Rico appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Give me the gun, Rico," Devlin said. His voice was steadier than his hand. He advanced another step. "There's a wedding tomorrow. Let's not have a wake."

Rico wavered, his eyes uncertain, but the store-bought courage was working in him strongly.

Devlin moved one stride. "Now, Rico."

He was moving when Rico fired, and Devlin clubbed the shrieking man three times while the sound of the shot was in the air. Rico fell face down, sobbing, as Devlin picked up the gun. People came from the other apartments.

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"I'm a cop," Devlin said. "Take it easy. Anybody here got a phone?"

He watched the superintendent mount the stairs in haste, his mouth agape, his eyes wide, bearing Devlin's bundle before him. He was doing fine until he saw the bodies and stumbled. He reached for the banister in panic as Devlin's package rolled the full depth of the stairs.

He got home at two o'clock, a weary man. He climbed the front steps with the compensating thought, It's my house, anyhow. I own it from the seepage in the cellar to the pigeon stains on the skylight.

He put the wedding gift down so he could dig in a pocket for his keys. The package ticked no longer and there were loose items adrift in it. He felt defeated and worn.

He went into the house, and he could smell coffee. He walked straight ahead to the kitchen, where Eddie Pfeiffer was sitting with Mae, quietly eating a bun. Mae seemed recovered from recent tears. She glanced at him strangely.

"I thought you were killed," she said, "until Eddie phoned the station house. What kind of a husband are you?"

He put the clock on the kitchen table. "I'm a tired one," Devlin said. He sat heavily in the chair she placed for him. He felt the pressure of her hands on his shoulders, the soft touch of her face against his own. "I guess I'm a stupid one too," he said sadly, while Eddie, an inquisitive man, began to examine the box. "I let a guy drop and ruin the gift I had for Mary and Joe."

"Yeah, we know that," Eddie said. "Rico was nothing. That's what the sergeant told us on the phone. Walking in on that hopped-up hyena was just a night's work, wasn't it? Poor Mary. Poor Deegan. I feel sorry for them."

Eddie brought forth the clock then, holding it high and turning it so that the painted roses bloomed in the light. The gold door under the dial was open and the figures were gone from it. The clock, was ominously still.

"It would have been real fancy," Devlin said. "Hey, what are you doin' now? Do those things fit?"

Eddie Pfeiffer had reached into the tall box for the missing figurines and set them carefully in place. "You're not the mechanical type," he said to Devlin. "You're not a modern scientific cop. You wouldn't know what to do."

"Because I never went to that F.B.I. school?" Devlin said.

"Sh-sh-sh," said Eddie now. "Be quiet." Gently, almost with affection, he shook the clock. "Hey, Devlin, how do you like that?"

"It's the most beautiful clock in all New York," Mae said, for they could hear it ticking strong.

Devlin looked away, because his eyes were moist again. I get so damned sentimental, he thought; don't know what's wrong with me.

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Blasphemous?

Sacrilegious?

Irreverent?

(once again!)

Your Editors take full responsibility for publishing "The Final Adventure." Will we be expelled, ejected, excluded, driven out, dismissed, sent packing, ousted, bounced, ostracized, banished, exiled, excommunicated and disinvestitured from the B.S.I., our names expunged from the conanical records, struck fom the canonical rolls, never to be breathed again in the sacred confines, forever to be held in disapproval and disgrace? Ah, 'tis but the occupational hazard that editorial flesh is heir to . . . We will bear the whips and scorns so that you may not be deprived of an opportunity to read of an enterprise of great pith and moment . . .

THE FINAL ADVENTURE

by SHANE STEVENS

IT WASN'T AS IF HE WANTED TO kill the man.

God knows he didn't have anything against the old fellow; as a matter of fact, he rather liked him in a way. After all, he mused, you can't live with someone for years without having some feeling for him. Not only was he fond of the good doctor, but he had found him perfectly invaluable at times. Why, there were instances he could think of when—but no matter, it was useless to reflect on the past. What must be done will be done and he had important business at hand.

He very carefully set down the suitcase he had carried home from the railway station. Nothing must be hurried, he reminded himself. Selecting his old clay from the pipe-rack he lit it slowly, taking several deep drags, contenting himself with blowing the cooling smoke through his lips and nostrils. All a matter of careful timing: smoking, drugs, even murder; all required utmost precision, nay, perfection, in every detail.

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He looked at himself in the full-length mirror. Same hawk-like features, same burning eyes, nothing to distinguish the face of a murderer from that of an ordinary citizen. It was all in the mind, then, or in the eye of the beholder. Certainly he will be no different after the deed is done. Yet doubts lingered. He had killed men, yes, killed in the line of duty so to speak; but this was vastly different. Here he would be killing a friend, a trusted admirer, an indefatigable co-worker. A man who, so far as he knew, never held a moment's grudge against him.

"Yet I must do this thing or I shall never rest," he said to himself in the solitary confines of his quarters. The good doctor was not yet home, would not be for three-quarters of an hour.

"So far, so good." He rubbed his hands in nervous anticipation.

The mantel clock struck four. The sound of the motor whirring as it gathered each time to strike appeared to unsettle the man sitting in the armchair. He got up hastily, went over to the suitcase, and picked it up very gently. Carrying it to his desk, he inserted a key in the bag's single lock and opened it slowly, as if dreading its contents. When the bag was thus opened, he reached in and took from it a metal container about the size of a large boot-box. This container also had a lock on it, a lock that gave the appearance of impregnable solidity —a lock, in short, not to be tampered with.

From a special compartment in his desk the man extracted a very heavy key made of polished bronze and, with a quick intake of breath, thrust the key in the lock and turned it. He then stepped some feet back and slowly raised the lid of the container, using his walking-stick as an extension. On his face was a look of utter disgust.

From the box came the sound of scampering feet and then a series of high-pitched squeals, barely audible yet loud enough to strike terror in the heart of any man hearing them. It was an unholy sound, a sound heretofore unheard on the shores of England. A sound, in fact, known only to missionaries and a tribe of aboriginal savages on an island in the Indian Ocean.

The tall spare man, sweat glistening on his forehead and beaked nose although his quarters were not uncomfortably warm, walked several times round the desk on which lay the curious object. Then, seeming to have reached a decision, he advanced to the desk and cautiously peered into the tightly-meshed wire screen covering one section of the container.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the dark interior, he began to see the outline of an animal. First the thin pointed feet, then the nervous furred body, and finally, the face: short pinched ears, sharp features, large fang teeth. It had somewhat

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the appearance of a cat but was larger even than many a domestic dog. The man's gaze travelled along the animal's body to its tail; extremely long and thin, snake-like.

"By jove," he exclaimed excitedly, "I don't believe I've ever seen one this huge. Why, it must weigh all of two stone." All past disgust was lost in this moment of fevered intensity.

He left the desk and walked over to a wooden filing-case. From one of its compartments he took out a folder, leafed through it quickly. "Ahh hah, got it." Carrying his find to the armchair, he seated himself and began reading.

It was a report of some eight written pages. A small precise scrawl, yet unmistakably masculine. A scrawl indicative of a careful, well-ordered man. The report was headed *Notes on the Journey to Sumatra,* and was in the handwriting of the reader. It was intended by the author to form the basis of a future monograph on employing jungle rot as a means of olfactory identification.

The man's attention was centered on the concluding paragraph of a sub-section of his report, detailing the physical and other characteristics of a strange beast found only on that island: ". . . as far as can be determined, the normal measurement of the beast is fully three feet from head to base of tail, and its weight almost two stone. The color is a mottled grey, common to most rodents, and the tail is an astonishingly thin affair, about two feet in length. The upper jaw fangs are easily thrice the size of those observed in the largest rodents of the English countryside. The beast's bite is instantly fatal but the exact cause of death is not presently known with any degree of certainty. Suffice to say that the victim gives evidence of a severe gastro-enteritis breakdown. Thus, the victim appears to have, in effect, suffered death of natural causes. It is known, however, that upon disgorging itself from the body of its victim, the beast immediately disappears into the nearest available waters, drowning itself. Natives, probably rightly, believe that the rodent, in biting a human, is itself somehow poisoned, and seeks death or some form of solace that only the waters can give. We are both of us at a loss to know what name to term this foul and horrible mishap of nature and so, at the suggestion of the good doctor, I mark it simply as the Giant Rat. Pray we may never see its like again, nor the world hear of it."

The man in the armchair shook his head several times and smiled to himself. "A pity times have changed, and we with them. But since there is no longer any crime worthy of my talents, I am forced to devise my own." With that he returned the papers to the filing-case, and resumed his stance at the wire screen. Squinting intently, he

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again examined his prisoner. "Yes, yes, it is even larger than the one I dealt with years ago." He looked pleased. "Well, my obnoxious little playmate, we have a most elementary thing for you to do this evening. Most elementary. And the one thing I daresay you're quite good at."

Working swiftly, the man closed the lid and carried the container into the adjoining bedroom. There, with infinite care, he transferred the beast to a clothes chest owned by the intended victim. The plan was ingeniously simple. The good doctor, as was his custom, would arrive home at about 4:45 and immediately repair to his bedroom, which was off the sitting-room to the left. There he would divest himself of his jacket and tie, and then go to the water closet to have a wash. Upon his return he would dip into his clothes chest for his favorite dressing-gown.

That was when the beast would strike. Thinking that it was being attacked as the unsuspecting doctor lowered his hand into the chest, the rodent would bite the hand and then scurry out of the chest seeking to escape. It would find the doors purposely left open to facilitate its access to the basement, from whence it should easily gain the river. It will, in effect, be the perfect murder since no one will ever know that murder had indeed been committed.

"And I shall have succeeded where my most brilliant adversaries have failed. My triumph shall be supreme."

He returned to the sitting-room, his mounting excitement caught in his every step. With almost superhuman effort he forced himself to sit in the armchair, playing all the while on his violin—or rather, repeating over and over a mournful dirge of some five or six notes.

Were anyone privileged to watch at that moment, he would unquestionably have remarked upon the tall man's close attention to his music. Yet nothing was further from his mind. He was, instead, deeply engrossed in a silent perusal of events leading up to this climatic moment. Where had it all begun, this perfect act of wilful destruction? Where had the first seedling been sown? Certainly not the first day he met the good doctor, nor even the day they agreed to share rooms for reasons of economy. No, he was not then so completely the master of his profession that he felt the despair of non-stimulation which was now so much a part of his daily existence. Nor did he then know of the man's incredible lack of any awareness. Or of his stuffiness or his pomposity. True, they had once amused him, but no longer.

Where then had it started? Perhaps with his feeling that all men were fools, that only he possessed extraordinary powers. Was this megalomania? No, he had decided

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it would have been in others, but not in himself. He was too cold, too methodical, to be afflicted with any psychological aberration. He had proved his infinite capacities of observation and deduction to that imbecile in the French Sûreté and to the entire English police force. His invincibility was widely recognized. What was left, finally, but to prove it to himself?

The clock struck 4:45. Shortly, very shortly now, it would all be over. He had only to wait for his master stroke of genius. A pity the world would never know.

Everything was in readiness. There could, there would, be no mistakes. He had planned too carefully. The rodent had arrived by steamer from Sumatra in a specially-built container; it had been drugged the entire journey. The specimen had been ordered by a medical laboratory in Scotland, which in turn had sent it on to London. The laboratory was a blind, of course, set up for the sole purpose of securing the rodent without arousing suspicion. The one aged attendant knew only that he was to send it by rail to London. The container was picked up by someone in disguise, using a fictitious name. Thus, there was no way in which the rodent could be traced to the present house, especially since nothing would ever be known of such a beast. The landlady was out for the evening, and no one would be home to witness the rodent's flight. It was, in essence and execution, simple and perfect.

At 4:52 the good doctor walked into the sitting-room. Affable and slightly harassed as usual.

"I say, but it's a frightful day. What with this infernal drizzle and the fog closing in, it's almost pitch-black outside."

"Well, old fellow, you're safe and sound at home now. Oh, and pray light the lamp, will you? I hadn't noticed it getting dark."

"Dark? Of course it's getting dark. How can you sit there and not be aware of it?"

"My dear fellow, darkness is merely a state of mind. For some that condition is never removed, unfortunately. Now if you will be so kind as to light the lamp."

"Eh, what, oh, yes, the lamp."

The doctor did as he was bid and then walked into his bedroom. In a moment he was out again, shorn of his jacket and tie.

"I see you've been over to the book-market district on your walk, and that you inspected some Seventeenth Century rare editions at Peters," remarked his companion.

"How the deuce could you know that?" exclaimed the doctor. "I told no one and have bought no books to indicate such a visit."

"Quite so, and yet what I say is plainly evident. Your trousers show red clayish stains which you could have got only from the phosphorus soil peculiar to that district. Your shirt is unusually ruffled, indicating

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that you discarded your jacket at some point. You would do this only in the stuffy confines of a browsing room. Finally, the edges of your shirt-cuffs have traces of a pile from a brownish fabric. Velours of this colour can come only from Seventeenth Century volumes, and I understand Peters booksellers has a rare collection on exhibit presently."

"Amazing!"

"Elementary, my dear fellow."

The doctor presently returned from the water closet and, humming, reentered his bedroom.

The man in the armchair watched him with a certain sadness in his deep-set eyes. "Good-bye, old fellow," he said very quietly.

There was one loud scream of pain from the bedroom, then a muffled roar and a heavy thud. A blur raced across the sitting-room floor, past the man in the armchair, and out the door.

The deed was done. The perfect murder had been committed.

He got up from the chair, intending to glance at the body and then hurry out to fetch a doctor; he would close and lock the door to the basement on his way out. His gaze fell on the metal container hidden under the desk. Yes, he would do well to get rid of it sometime, though it was not dangerous since no one suspected anything. He placed it in the bottom of the filing-case.

Before going out he thought it best, being a careful man, to deposit some extremely dangerous chemicals in the safe, lest anything unforeseen happen in the confusion of the death. The safe was a home-made affair of metal that he had installed in the solid brick outer wall of the house; the door, also of heavyplate metal, opened with a key. Only he and his companion, now dead, had the proper keys.

He withdrew his from its ring and inserted it in the lock of the safe. As he drew open the door, a single shot was fired from inside the safe. The shot entered his forehead left of center, tore through the cerebral cortex, then travelled downwards, taking with it a goodly part of his skull. He was dead before his body reached the floor.

The police, informed of the noise by a curious passer-by, arrived some twenty minutes later, Inspector L. among them. It was he who found the note in the safe. He read it aloud: "My dear H. It would be too much to expect a man to be at your side for so many years without acquiring some of your powers of perception and cunning. I have, in turn, afforded a surprise of my own. It is unfortunate that neither of us will be able to appreciate it. I therefore write this, though you will never know of its contents, only as a final triumph of ego. So much for you and your vaunted powers, Mister Consulting Detective."

The note was unsigned.

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PASTICHE IS AS PASTICHE DOES

In the same way that there is a story behind the story of "The Adventure of the Second Stain," there is also a story behind the story of "The True Adventure of the Second Stain" . . .

In 1967 the "Sunday Times" of Johannesburg, South Africa, launched a short-story contest offering R300 in prizes for the two best versions of A. Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Second Stain" —the true *version that Doyle (and Watson) never made public. A condition of the contest was that all submissions must be written "as Conan Doyle might have done it"—in a phrase, as a genuine pastiche. The "Sunday Times" pointed out to the competitors that "Dr. Watson has already given you some valuable hints; the rest is left to your imagination, inventive skill and writing craftsmanship."*

The competition closed on September 30, 1967, and one of the entries was W. Heidenfeld's story sent to South Africa all the way from Dublin, Ireland. Mr. Heidenfeld's story was not one of the winners in the South African contest, but we are happy indeed that he decided to send the story to EQMM. It is this "reconstruction" that we now give you, and it is worth repeating that Mr. Heidenfeld's story is absolutely pure pastiche—there is no hint or slightest implication of parody, spoof, burlesque, or satire. It is a serious attempt to write a Sherlock Holmes story precisely in the manner of Holmes's creator . . .

THE TRUE ADVENTURE OF THE SECOND STAIN

by W. HEIDENFELD

IT IS WITH A GUILTY CONSCIENCE—yet withal not without a certain sense of exhilaration—that I take up my pen to record what must rank as one of Sherlock Holmes's most important cases. I have always endeavoured to make these unembellished narratives a true record of the mysteries solved through the unique gifts possessed by my

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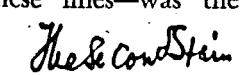
friend. For the only time in my career as a chronicler of these events I departed from the narrow path of truth when, in the introduction to the problem of the Naval Treaty, I referred to notes I purported to have made under the heading *The Adventure of the Second Stain*. Verily, I meant every word of what I said on that occasion: "No case, however, in which Holmes was ever engaged . . . has impressed those who were associated with him so deeply."

Who after all was more closely associated with Holmes than I have been? And so it was I who, impressed by the methods I knew so well, erected a structure of deliberate mystification which culminated in the much later story entitled *The Adventure of the Second Stain*—a tale I now admit to have been pure invention to "cover up," as the modern idiom has it, the indiscreet references in the story relating to the theft of the naval treaty. The more astute of my readers will certainly have noticed the extraordinary vagueness that pervades background and setting of *The Second Stain,* as well as the absence of certain characters I so imprudently mentioned in the introduction to the earlier story; they may also have wondered why it should have been necessary to preserve such discretion about what really amounted to an affair of little consequence. They will be relieved to hear that all these shortcomings were owing to the feebleness of my inventive powers, which proved quite inadequate to the task I had set myself.

Just as, on another occasion, Holmes pointed out that the curious incident of the dog in the night-time was that it did nothing, I may say that the mystery of the second stain consists in the fact that there never was a stain—first, second, or third. What I actually jotted down on the cover of the file—I have it in front of me as I pen these lines—was the legend



In other words, "These contain (DS)"—in which the letters DS stand for both the word *dossier* and the title *Doctor of Science*—a deception played on prying eyes, which, I cannot help fancying, would have appealed to Holmes.

As for the Doctor of Science referred to, surely my readers will remember that in the *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* the narrative of the Naval Treaty immediately precedes that of the Final Problem, despite the fact that almost three years intervened between the two affairs. This is by no means a mere coincidence. It was in the Final Problem that Holmes engaged in his deadly and ultimately victorious duel with Professor Moriarty. Here again the discerning reader may have noticed curious gaps in the narrative—above all, a complete absence of any answer not only as

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to why but how a man of mere academic accomplishments should have become such a force in the underworld. It stands to reason that to establish a position of such nefarious eminence would require wide connections in many walks of life, as well as ready access to large sums of money with which to command the loyalty of a vast army of underlings. It is the file in front of me which provides the full and, I may well say, incredible answer to these questions—an answer, moreover, which demanded the preservation of absolute discretion lest any leak of the facts might have led to a European conflagration of inestimable magnitude.

The modern reader may be inclined to regard mid-July 1888, the period of the events I am about to narrate, as a haven of peace and calm. Nothing could be further from the truth. Italy had just annexed Massowah. In Germany, the peace-loving, Anglophile Emperor Frederick III had succumbed to his horrible disease but a month before, and had been succeeded by an imprudent young man, William II.

France was a cauldron of conflicting emotions. The Cabinet of Monsieur Charles Floquet was but three months old and it did not look as if it would grow much older. The previous year there had been a succession of scandals, one of which, the traffic in military decorations (an offence which, I feel confident to assert, would be impossible in these islands), had led to the resignation of the President of the Republic. Boulangism—the dangerous revanchist movement that attracted not only the more radical Republicans, but all the malcontents, Royalists, and Bonapartists alike—was spreading like a plague throughout France. General Boulanger—Général Revanche, as he was called by friend and foe—having been sentenced to retirement by a court of five generals, had lost no time in forming a political party. Elected to the Chamber of Deputies after a violent campaign, he had demanded the immediate revision of the Constitution. The tiniest drop of further fuel poured on the flames of contending jealousies, interests, and ambitions could have caused an explosion that would have reverberated around the world.

On the morning of the fourteenth—a Saturday—I had an early breakfast by myself in Holmes's study. My wife had gone to Tunbridge Wells the previous week to be with her ailing aunt and was not expected back before Sunday night; and with my practice at its lowest ebb, as it usually was in July, I had spent a few days with Holmes, savouring once again the thrills and disappointments of my bachelor days.

Usually an early riser, Holmes was late in coming down this morning. When at last he appeared, clad in the old mouse-coloured

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dressing-gown, he seemed taciturn and self-absorbed. I knew better than to disturb him in this mood; quietly watching him from my old armchair, I saw him glance through the agony column of the *Times* without any show of interest. To my great surprise, however, he seemed fascinated by the editorial pages. Knowing that these dealt with the story of the duel between General Boulanger and Monsieur Floquet the day before, I began to wonder at the strange whims of my friend's nature.

Getting up, I heard him speak for the first time that morning: "You'll find the Bradshaw right under the cushion you have been sitting on, Watson."

I stared at him open-mouthed before I managed to stammer: "This is really beyond the limit, Holmes. I admit I have been looking for the Bradshaw, but how you could possibly have known—"

"Tut tut, Watson, it was really elementary," said he. "Your expression is always very eloquent."

"Granted that it is, Holmes, I still fail to see—"

"I noticed your expression of disbelief as I was perusing the account of the strange business in the French Chamber. You may remember that, in the affair of the Five Orange Pips, you had quite correctly marked my interest in philosophy, astronomy, and politics as zero. So you fell to wondering how people change, which brought to your mind the change in your own life. As you visualised the comforts provided by your good Mary and contrasted them—much to my disadvantage, I do not doubt—with the frugality of my study, you fell to contemplating the golden band around your finger which symbolises your recently-acquired status. You next looked at the corner of the bookshelf that used to contain the handier works of reference. Knowing that your wife was expected to-morrow night, I concluded that you wanted to verify the time of arrival of the last up-train from Tunbridge Wells."

"It is really child's play, as you say, Holmes." I disregarded the slight frown of disappointment at this all-too-ready agreement with his own estimate. "But it does not solve the puzzle of your sudden interest in politics."

"I have no interest in politics, Watson. But I cannot help being interested in the people who make politics. Listen to this." He lifted the page of the *Times* in which he had recently been absorbed and read:

"To be worsted in a duel with a civilian is, perhaps, as cruel a punishment as his opponents would desire for a music-hall hero. No one would have thought of such a mode of abating General Boulanger's intolerable pretensions; but since he has invented it for himself it is impossible not to

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recognise its dramatic fitness." He dropped the paper. "You must admit, Watson, that where it is a matter of the *mot juste,* the *Times* stands alone. This account should interest you as a writer."

"So it does, Holmes, but I am still at a loss to understand why it interests you as a scientist. There is more here than meets the eye."

"*Touché,* my dear fellow," said he, "your native shrewdness is not easily deceived. As it happens, Monsieur Dubugue, of the Paris police, and his friend, Herr Fritz von Waldbaum, the well-known Danzig expert, have arranged to call this very morning in order to consult us on a matter about which they are very secretive; yet Monsieur Dubugue has hinted that I might do well to keep an eye on the affairs of General Boulanger. But if I am not mistaken, the commotion downstairs suggests that our Continental friends have arrived. I trust that, since they have come to pick our brains, they will not boggle at my *deshabille.*"

Soon the four of us were seated in the study, each of our visitors puffing one of Holmes's cigars with evident enjoyment, while he himself got busy with the old briar pipe. The two of them made an incongruous pair: Dubugue, a small man with the sharply-chiselled features of the fashionable type of Gallic intellectual, and a slightly piping voice; von Waldbaum, a cartoonist's dream of a Teuton, thick-set, gross but *gemütlich,* and with a voice to match his volume. It was the Frenchman who, in answer to Holmes's query, had begun to set out the reasons for their visit.

"I am afraid, Mr. Holmes, that my story may disappoint a man of logic like yourself. There is, as far as I can see, nothing a criminologist can get his teeth into—there may not even be a crime, for in France we regard a man's life as his own and no criminal significance attaches to the act of suicide. Still, where one suicide suggests nothing of interest to the police—bar the task of verifying that it is indeed suicide—a series of such events is an altogether different business. Though the mathematicians may disagree with me, in my country four times nought is not necessarily nought. In the past couple of weeks we have had three prominent French citizens put an end to their lives, two in Paris and one in Versailles, and there has been a fourth case in far-away Danzig, which has brought Herr von Waldbaum into the affair."

"I assume," said Holmes, "that there is a connecting link between the four cases—else why should you consult me? Is there any doubt regarding their being suicides?"

"Yes to your first question, Mr. Holmes, no to the second. There is certainly no doubt in regard to the suicides of Monsieur Henri Desrousseaux, the well-known fi-

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nancier of the *Banque Baltique,* with headquarters in Danzig, or of Monsieur Jacques Apollinaire, the Paris scientist of whom you may have heard—he is an authority on the geographical, anthropological, and historic ties between Spain and the countries of Northern Africa. We are not so sure about the first two cases, in Versailles and Paris, because these were handled by the local authorities before we had any inkling that this thing would assume epidemic proportions."

"We may assume, then," said Holmes, "that they are all above board. For either the events are not really connected, in which case there is no reason for assuming that the first two are not above suspicion; or they are connected, in which case the, let us say, *bona fides* of the last two vouchsafes for the genuineness of the first two. Pray proceed."

"Very clearly put, Mr. Holmes. But I am afraid I am on much less sure ground where the connecting link is concerned. All four were wealthy men, all four were prominent in public life, and all four were widely-travelled; but this does not get us much further, for it is the wealthy and the prominent who usually travel abroad while the less well-to-do and the obscure stay at home."

"Quite true," said Holmes with a smile, "but logic all the same compels us not to disregard your third point. While it is correct to suggest that in the main only the wealthy are likely to travel extensively, this does not mean that all those blessed with earthly possessions are travellers—think of the landed aristocracy whose only journeys take them from their country estates to Paris and back again. There have been, I presume, no suicides among the wealthy stay-at-homes?"

"I must admit the point had not occurred to me," mumbled the French detective through a haze of cigar smoke. "You are undoubtedly correct. Now, there is one further point that seems to establish a certain link—tenuous though it may be—between the cases of the Danzig banker and the Paris scientist. Here again I have no information regarding the other two cases, which would either confirm, or disprove, my observation. The authorities concerned had no particular reason for subjecting the papers in possession of the deceased to a really painstaking analysis. Both Desrousseaux and Apollinaire, however, were offered an *objet d'art* of considerable value in their special fields of connoisseurship, on the very day of, or possibly the day before, their deaths. Desrousseaux was offered a set of Chinese chessmen of the finest South Cantonese workmanship—'we have the goods for inspection and they are verified,' says the letter found on his desk. Herr von Waldbaum—"

"Was the late banker a chess

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player?" interrupted Holmes.

"No." Von Waldbaum's voice boomed through the room as he took up the tale. "But he was a collector of Chinese curios—he had travelled extensively in many parts of China many years before—and he is the author of a small monograph on the different schools of ivory carving."

"Pottery is more in my line," said Holmes. "However, I shall make a note to acquire this little volume; the subject seems of sufficient interest to engage my attention in the slack periods caused by the deplorable laziness of the criminal classes. But continue."

"Apollinaire, who, besides his many scientific interests, was a student of French literature and a well-known bibliophile, was offered what purported to be the original manuscript of the *Le Barbier of Séville*. What struck us as most remarkable about both offers was that they obviously came from accommodation addresses in London, and the prices asked were expressed in pounds."

"Ah," said Holmes with a malicious smile, "this is presumably what allows me to enter the case. Never mind. What were the prices asked?"

It was Dubugue's turn to smile. "Ten thousand pounds for the chess set, fifteen thousand for the manuscript," he said.

Holmes almost rose from his chair. "But this is preposterous," he exclaimed. "Ten thousand for a chess set? Fifteen thousand for a Beaumarchais manuscript? I know he is held in much higher esteem across the Channel than over here—but even so, for a sum of that order you could get the whole of Molière."

"We were as mystified by the demand as you are, Mr. Holmes. Still, if a man does not want to pay the price, he merely has to say so. On the face of it, it hardly seems a reason for taking one's own life."

"There is some devilry afoot here, I have no doubt," Holmes mumbled absent-mindedly. "Meanwhile, what has all this to do with General Boulanger? You remember you stated in your letter—"

"What, Boulanger again?" Herr von Waldbaum broke in. "I tell you, Mr. Holmes, French Government officials these days have Boulanger with their *noir,* in their soup, and on their brain. Whatever happens, they seem to think, occurs either because of him or in spite of him. You did not mention any of this nonsense to me, Dubugue," he said, accusingly to his friend.

"Well, a great deal happens because of him, you must admit. This duel now—we have incontrovertible evidence that if he had emerged victorious it would have been the signal for a *coup d'état.* The whole challenge was contrived with this end in view; it misfired because of the bravery of our Prime Minister, and the Gen-

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eral has had to retire and lick his wounds. But whether he has indeed a finger in the pie I have been telling you about—*qui sait?* You know we have certain ways of obtaining information that are, regrettably enough, not open to our opposite numbers at the Yard. Thus we know that General Boulanger's National Liberation Front has recently been inundated with munificent donations—all from London and all in pounds. A connection? I do not know, but we Frenchmen have, how shall I put it?—*le flaire, l'imagination*—and we may well build bridges where none exist."

Holmes had sunk into deep thought. "I distrust imagination to take the place of logic," he now remarked, "but I will not deny that it may produce results which, in spite of their fanciful provenance, are not necessarily untrue. It is not always simple to link cause and effect. But one thing I cannot believe. General Boulanger strikes me as a buffoon, a windbag, a mountebank. He may plot, but he cannot plan. If such a type were to plan, he could not adhere to his schedule for as little as twenty-four hours. No, gentlemen, if there is indeed a thread that connects these suicides with the National Liberation Front, it is spun by a subtler mind than the General's.

"Meanwhile, gentlemen, I need not detain you. I shall make discreet inquiries into the London addresses you have mentioned in your letter and I shall also try to trace the source of the mysterious donations. I admit I am not very hopeful. What we really need—it may sound callous—is another suicide supplying more detailed data. This type of mystery is like a cipher—the more material you have to work on, the better your chance of unravelling it."

As it happened, we did not have to wait long for the more detailed data desired by Holmes. Hardly ten minutes had elapsed since the departure of our visitors when we heard hurried steps chasing up our stairs three at a time, our door was pulled open with a jerk, and a man whirled into our room with the force of a minor tornado. "And what can we do for you, Inspector MacDonald?" Holmes asked without looking up.

"Haven't you heard, Mr. Holmes?" exclaimed the excited newcomer. "It's all over town. Mr. John Anstruther has blown his brains out."

Holmes and I looked at each other. "This is most grati—hum, most interesting news," he said. "It seems to be the season for suicides. At least it is not a Frenchman this time, though nobody can deny that he was wealthy, prominent, and widely-travelled."

"Why in heaven's name should he be a Frenchman?" the inspector expostulated. He had expected his

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news to produce a somewhat different effect—the late Mr. Anstruther had been known as a sort of patron saint of Scotland Yard, a sponsor of various schemes to the benefit of police-officers and their families.

If it had been Lestrade or Gregson, Holmes might well have disdained to answer what, in the circumstances, was certainly a reasonable question. But he had a high opinion of MacDonald, and his relations with him were of the pleasantest. Patiently and without asking any of the questions that must have been burning his tongue, he gave the young detective the gist of the morning's proceedings. "I need hardly tell you," he concluded, "that I am looking forward to a perusal of Mr. Anstruther's recent correspondence. First, however, let us consult our trusty oracle."

With these words he picked up a red-covered volume from the books of reference at the corner of the shelf. "Albany, Allenhead, Anstruther, ah, here we are . . . Anstruther, John Timothy, second son of Sir John Edward Anstruther, 52, widower, formerly married to Agnes Isabelle de Cordoba Machado, a member of the Brazilian aristocracy, no children. Hobbies: golf, philately. Town residence: Lanyard House, Church Walk, Hampstead."

"I have just come from there, Mr. Holmes," said the detective, "and it was little more than a whim that made me stop at your place on my way back to the Yard. In view of what you have told me, I shall have to return to Lanyard House, and I feel sure that I won't be alone on my return journey, eh?"

While our landlady went calling for a hansom, Holmes changed into his black frock-coat, and soon we were carried through the fine drizzle of a typical London summer day to the scene of the tragedy. Holmes was withdrawn and unresponsive to the details MacDonald was trying his best to provide. Nor, on arrival at the rather forbidding-looking old brick residence, did he go into his usual sharp-eyed routine.

Never have I seen Holmes so perfunctory in the investigation of what might easily have turned out to be a serious crime. He hardly glanced at the corpse, which the policeman on duty had covered with a sheet; he scarcely bothered to question the butler, porter, and gardener, all of whom had been on the premises at the time; and though the place seemed littered with tobacco ashes, he even disdained to go into his favourite branch of examination. Almost at once he pounced on a sheaf of papers lying in an untidy heap on the desk in front of which the late owner of the house had been found. Discarding a bill from a West End tailoring establishment

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and various other odds and ends, he soon found what he was after.

Looking over his shoulder, I observed a plain sheet of white paper, headed W. Smith and a Regent's Park address, and reading as follows:

Dear Mr. Anstruther,

We have pleasure in offering you an excellent lot of bull's eyes —some goats' included—all fine Pernambuco p.m., at the all-in price of £12,000. The goods are genuine, and we can produce certificates.

Since other parties have evinced an interest in this offer, we would like you to treat this matter as urgent and would appreciate an early reply to the above address.

Yours truly,

(illegible signature)

I looked at MacDonald and he looked at me. "Goats' and bull's eyes—what in the name of heaven does this mean?" I asked. But Holmes merely went across to the butler, who had waited in the door, and gave him a few hurried instructions which I could not catch.

Returning to the desk, he said quietly: "You know, Watson, the jargon of professions, pursuits, and hobbies has really grown to such an extent that it would be worth somebody's while to compile a dictionary of this modern argot. What, for example, would you think if you overheard a man say, 'So I stripped him and threw him on the table'? Violence and mayhem, and possibly worse, I have no doubt. Yet to a devotee of the new-fangled game of Russian whist, or biritch, as it is called, which has begun to supplant our old-fashioned game of whist in some London clubs, it would merely signify that the speaker, after taking away Declarers' exit cards, forced him to make an unfavourable lead from the dummy hand.

"Similarly, to a philatelist bull's eyes and goats' eyes—surely you have noted the apostrophe after 'goats' '—denote the first and second issues of the postage stamps of Brazil; their names are derived from their shape and appearance. Fine, genuine copies of some of the first two issues are much sought-after by collectors; though once again the price demanded in this little note is exorbitant. The p.m. following the word Pernambuco stands for 'post mark,' I have no doubt."

MacDonald and I were still chuckling at this ready solution to what had seemed an inscrutable mystery to both of us when the butler re-appeared with three large leather-covered volumes which he placed before Holmes. "You are sure this is all?" Holmes asked him, and on the man's affirmative nod he began to turn over the pages of the late Mr. Anstruther's stamp collection.

During the next hour I discovered an entirely new facet of

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my friend's complex personality. Not a collector himself, he yet seemed to know all there was to know about the hobby; and he displayed the exuberant enthusiasm of a child to whom Santa Claus has presented a much-coveted toy. As he turned the pages, he drew our attention to some of the treasures he discovered. Even I, to whom a postage stamp means something to be affixed to a letter after which its usefulness comes to an end, began to be infected with his delight in the journey on which we had embarked. Holmes singled out a mint strip of four of what he called the russet-red Three of Saxony, remarking on its extreme rarity; he lovingly contemplated several pages of stamps showing the image of Napoleon III, with and without a laurel wreath on his head, and obliterated by various patterns of dots and grilles; he grew almost respectful at the sight of some ungainly labels displaying little beyond a figure and an outlandish coat-of-arms, which he said were the scarce first issues of Finland; and he went into raptures over a specimen he referred to as the Dove of Basle. "This," he remarked, closing the last volume, "is an unusually fine collection and will one day be worth a fortune."

"But there are large gaps, are there not?" I asked. "I remember when I was a boy all of us were thrilled with the Cape triangular stamps; or, again, I saw very queer-looking and all but indecipherable labels during the campaign in Afghanistan. I noticed none of these in this collection."

"An important point, Watson, on which the solution of this case may well hinge."

"Really, Holmes," I said, somewhat nettled, "there is no need for sarcasm. It was a perfectly proper remark and not deserving of your censure."

"But my dear chap," he answered with evident surprise, "has it not occurred to you that the absence of the Cape triangulars, not to mention your Afghan favourites, is the most significant fact we have discovered so far?"

"You must be joking, Holmes. I cannot see any significance in it. What has occurred to me, though, is that you seem to be convinced that this affair belongs to the series of inexplicable deaths we heard about this morning. In that case, surely, an international gang must be at work by some mysterious means. For one person to contrive the suicides of men in so many different walks of life and so far apart, would require somebody who is ubiquitous and omniscient —a veritable Napoleon of crime."

"I agree, Mr. Holmes," interjected the hitherto silent detective. "And this assumption is supported by the word 'we' in the letter where 'I' would have sufficed. There is no letterhead of a firm, so why the use of 'we'?"

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"Good for you to have noticed a small point like that," said Holmes, "though I fancy there may be another explanation. As for you, Watson, you have your uses, most decidedly so, you and your gift of tongues. Ubiquitous and omniscient, yes, yes. It is an idea. Meanwhile, since there is nothing more for us to learn here, I suggest we pack up and leave. I shall conduct my further investigation from the Chislehurst end."

"The Chislehurst end?" MacDonald and I exclaimed in one breath. "What happened at Chislehurst?"

"It's a long shot, Watson, a very long shot, but you know my methods. As for you, MacDonald, pray keep me informed of developments; meanwhile, I bid you goodbye."

What with Mary's return and an unseasonable improvement in my practice, a week had gone by before I had a chance of visiting Holmes, whom I found busy mixing some vile-smelling chemicals. "Find yourself a seat, Watson," he shouted joyously, pushing a pile of books off my old armchair, "and help yourself to some shag from the slipper. I have much to tell you."

"Have any arrests been made yet in the matter of the wealthy suicides?" I said, with a feeble attempt at joking.

"There won't be any arrest, Watson, much though I regret the fact, nor will there be any more suicides; but the estimable General Boulanger will feel a sudden draught in his war chest. Dubugue was right, up to a point, and von Waldbaum was wrong. When I went home that day, I certainly did not allow the grass to grow under my feet, and by Wednesday I was in a position to send a carefully-worded little note to an old friend of ours, of which I have made a copy for your entertainment."

Scrabbling in the pocket of his dressing-gown, he produced a crumpled sheet of paper.

"My dear Professor," I read, "it is my pleasure to offer you an exquisite Sedan chair of the finest workmanship, at a price well within your range—shall we say, £5,000? Needless to say, I have verified its antecedents. Whether you will avail yourself of this offer or not, I should esteem it a great favour if you would kindly acknowledge receiving it.

Acceptez, cher professeur, mes plus beaux regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sherlock Holmes."

"I am pleased to report," said Holmes, "that the desired acknowledgment, in the form of a polite refusal to entertain the offer, arrived by the first mail this morning. I can but hope that this will be the end of the matter."

"But, Holmes," I cried, "a Sedan chair? Why a Sedan chair? And what would you have done if he

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had accepted—you don't own a Sedan chair!"

"I was sure the offer would be rejected, Watson—besides, has it not occurred to you that the stipulated sum would enable me to buy a hundred Sedan chairs?"

"There is that, of course, Holmes," I said, crestfallen. "Really, my head is in a whirl. And why is the last sentence in French?"

"Sometimes," he answered with a twinkle in his eye, "you can make a point more clearly in the French language—even in this kitchen French which no member of the *Académie* would be likely to acknowledge as his language. It is a tongue, so I have been told, particularly suited to the refinements of concealment and emphasis alike. But I am sure it would simplify matters if I were to begin at the beginning."

"An excellent idea, Holmes. It might make your train of thought somewhat easier to follow."

"It was not difficult to see that the offers to Desrousseaux, Apollinaire, and Anstruther were a subtle form of blackmail. Each of them mentioned a specific locality —Canton, Seville, and Pernambuco. I am unable to judge whether there is indeed a peculiar form of South Cantonese ivory craft, and Beaumarchais did happen to assign his barber to the town of Seville. But on the third occasion the mention of Pernambuco was quite gratuitous—I made inquiries up and down the Strand, and not a single expert has ever heard of any special value attaching to Pernambuco post marks. Connect this with the facts that Desrousseaux had undoubtedly visited Canton, that Apollinaire's work was at the least extremely likely to have taken him to Seville, and that Anstruther was married to a Brazilian lady, and a pattern begins to emerge: under the guise of offering a rare and valuable object for sale the writer threatens to disclose some episode in the life of the people concerned. What these episodes were, we can but conjecture, but it is of no importance. For in the third case, at least, I was certain that I was on the right track: the blackmailer had overlooked that philately, relatively young though the hobby is, has already produced a great deal of specialization. It was obvious from the collection we viewed that Anstruther confined his interest to the classic issues of Continental Europe."

"The absence of the Cape and Afghanistan," I moaned.

"You put your finger on the very spot, Watson. This offer, if it were genuine, could not be of the slightest interest to Anstruther. Having proceeded so far, I examined the wording of the letter more closely. 'The goods are genuine, and we can produce certificates,' it said, meaning 'we have the goods on you, and you know

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it's a true bill.' At the same time nobody but the victim could read it that way.

"The next step was more difficult. Who was the blackmailer and since blackmail could never be proved against him, how could he be trapped? You may remember that both you and MacDonald suggested the working of a gang. This I discarded at once. The information might have been gathered by paid underlings, but the actual operation of the scheme had to be the work of a lone wolf—the blackmailer more than any other criminal knows the value of working alone, lest he become the victim one day instead of the agent. Thus, almost of their own accord, my thoughts returned to Professor Moriarty, whom I had occasion to mention to you before—the spider in his web, infinitely clever and infinitely dangerous.

"Like MacDonald, however, I was intrigued by the use of the word 'we' in the blackmail note. It was only when you coined that striking phrase, my dear chap, the reference to a Napoleon of crime, that I began to have a glimmering of the truth—incredible though it appeared to me at the time. Before I proceed, however, you must promise me that no word of what I am going to disclose to you now will get any further. Absolute secrecy is of the utmost importance for many years to come."

"You have my word, Holmes," I said, awed by the seriousness of his demeanour.

"Many a true word, Watson, is spoken in jest—or in hyperbole. A Napoleon of crime—why not? We have had two Napoleons of power and glory, why should there not be one of infamy? In other words, what if a Napoleon of crime were interpreted literally—a member of the Buonaparte family ruling the underworld as those others have ruled the world? What if the 'we' of the note was a well-known and frequently-used form of 'we'—the *pluralis majestatis?*"

"Impossible," I cried.

"Not only is it possible, Watson, I have proved it to be a fact. Professor Moriarty is a natural son of Napoleon III. You may remember that a constant streak of illegitimacy runs through the Buonaparte family. Other times, other *mores,* Watson—and the moral standards of our good Queen have found favour in few royal houses. The third Napoleon's half brother, the Duc de Morny, a well-known financier and gambler, to whom the Emperor was indebted on many occasions, was the natural son of Hortense Beauhearnais. Prince Louis Napoleon himself, the late Emperor, was at one time suspected of being illegitimate, though present-day historians have scotched this myth. The Prince was famous for his own *affaires du coeur;* even when confined to the prison of Ham, you may remem-

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ber, he conducted a successful affair with Eleanore Vergeot, *la belle sabotière*. But it was in London, both before and after his imprisonment, that he really let himself go. You may have read Disraeli's *Endymion,* in which he describes the young prince, his luxurious establishment in Carlton Gardens, his close friendship with a small but influential group of men, his delight in the charms of society and especially of agreeable women—rather a delicate use of the word 'agreeable,' don't you think?

"After his dethronement Napoleon once more returned to England, and it was at Camden Place, Chislehurst, that he spent the evening of his life. His ties with England were strong and lasting, and it was one of his British admirers, the well-known Elizabeth Haryett, later elevated to the rank of a Comtesse de Beauregard, who, unknown to the world, gave birth to a son by her paramour, probably in the year 1847—which would make Moriarty forty-one years of age. The child was looked after for many years by his uncle, the Duc de Morny—even the resemblance in the names Morny and Moriarty is, I have no doubt, contrived—and upon his death in 1865 the Duke left him a large portion of his enormous fortune. It is this money which has enabled the talented adventurer to build up a formidable criminal organization.

"You will realize that the key fact of Moriarty's parentage unlocks many of the mysteries in this affair. Right to the end Napoleon III was eager to return to the throne; his plotting outlasted his life, for when he died on January 9, 1873 a triumphant return had been planned for a date in March. No wonder Moriarty, who has much of the overbearing arrogance of the Buonapartes, uses part of his ill-gotten gains to finance the National Liberation Front, which, though Republican in avowed intent, might easily end in a Bonapartist pretender ascending once again the throne of France. Presumably many victims of his net preferred paying up to suicide—hence, the donations to the Boulangist cash-box. And no wonder that Moriarty, the quiet don of mathematics, had, throughout his career, not only the means but also the contacts to build up a veritable empire of crime.

"But once all this was known to me, his very strength became his weakness—he, too, became vulnerable to blackmail. There is no game, Watson, at which two cannot play. How could this son of Napoleon afford to ignore a polite note in his own style, stressing the names of Sedan and Beauregard? If his criminal connections were made public property, how could Boulangism and all it stands for survive? If he wants to save his own 'empire,' he will not only have

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to stop this game of blackmail, he will also have to break his connection with the Boulangists. At the same time I shall be safe from his vengeance until such time as I have proof positive of his other nefarious activities and could hurt him worse than by mere publicity. The day will come, Watson, rest assured the day will come."

There is little to add to Holmes's dramatic account. A polite note was despatched to Monsieur Dubugue, stating that Holmes had reason to believe there would be no further sensational suicides. It is only now, after Holmes has gone to a land where there is no crime and no need for secrecy, and all the principals in this mysterious affair have gone with him, that I feel at liberty to publish the full facts. One small point, in particular, has always irked me: that the world at large should have been unable to learn that it was the Sage of Baker Street—as Sherlock Holmes has meanwhile come to be called in the popular press—who was responsible for the decline of the Boulangist movement. It is a point of no inconsiderable irony—for is not Boulanger the French word for Baker?

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a *famous* detective *NOVELET* by

CORNELL WOOLRICH (William Irish)

Hal Jeffries was almost immobilized in his rear apartment—he could just manage to get from his bed to the window of his bedroom, and back again. So the world outside was strictly limited for him—restricted to the apartments that faced on the rear quadrangle, and to the people who lived in them. His whole life, day and night, was watching other people's rear windows . . .

This is one of the most famous of the Cornell Woolrich-William Irish novelets . . . It was originally published in 1942 in "Dime Detective" and titled "It Had To Be Murder." Its fame blossomed when it became the highly successful motion picture titled "Rear Window" —Alfred Hitchcock's thriller for Paramount in 1954, starring James Stewart, Grace Kelly, Wendell Corey, and Thelma Ritter.

The passage of time (more than a quarter of a century since it was first published!) has not dimmed the luster of this story. It builds suspense inexorably, grippingly; it packs a wallop, a knockout punch, and radiates the Woolrich-Irish magic of "everyday-gone-wrong"—terribly, frighteningly wrong . . .

REAR WINDOW

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

I DIDN'T KNOW THEIR NAMES. I'D never heard their voices. I didn't even know them by sight, strictly speaking, for their faces were too small to fill in with identifiable features at that distance. Yet I could have constructed a timetable of their comings and goings, their daily activities. They were the rear-window dwellers around me.

Sure, I suppose it *was* a little bit like prying, could even have been mistaken for the fevered concentration of a Peeping Tom. That wasn't my fault, that wasn't the idea. The idea was, my movements were strictly limited just around this time. I could get from the window to the bed, from the bed to the window, and that was all.

© *1942 by Cornell Woolrich; originally titled "It Had To Be Murder".*

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The bay window was about the best feature my rear bedroom had in the warm weather. It was unscreened, so I had to sit with the light out or I would have had every insect in the vicinity in on me. I couldn't sleep, because I was used to getting plenty of exercise. I'd never acquired the habit of reading books to ward off boredom, so I hadn't that to turn to. Well, what should I do, sit there with my eyes tightly shuttered?

Just to pick a few at random: straight over, and the windows square, there was a young jittercouple, kids in their teens, only just married. It would have killed them to stay home one night. They were always in such a hurry to go, wherever it was they went, they never remembered to turn out the lights. I don't think it missed once in all the time I was watching. But they never forgot altogether, either. I was to learn to call this delayed action, as you will see. He'd always come skittering madly back in about five minutes, probably from all the way down in the street, and rush around killing the switches. Then fall over something in the dark on his way out. They gave me an inward chuckle, those two.

The next house down, the windows already narrowed a little with perspective. There was a certain light in that one that always went out each night too. Something about it, it used to make me a little sad. There was a woman living there with her child, a young widow, I suppose. I'd see her put the child to bed, and then bend over and kiss her in a wistful sort of way. She'd shade the light off her and sit there painting her eyes and mouth. Then she'd go out. She'd never come back till the night was nearly spent. Once I was still up, and I looked and she was sitting there motionless with her head buried in her arms. Something about it used to make me a little sad.

The third one down no longer offered any insight, the windows were just slits like in a medieval battlement, due to foreshortening. That brings us around to the one on the end. In that one, frontal vision came back full-depth again, since it stood at right angles to the rest, my own included, sealing up the inner hollow all these houses backed on. I could see into it, from the rounded projection of my bay window, as freely as into a doll house with its rear wall sliced away. And scaled down to about the same size.

It was a flat building. Unlike all the rest it had been constructed originally as such, not just cut up into furnished rooms. It topped them by two stories and had rear fire escapes, to show for this distinction. But it was old, evidently hadn't shown a profit. It was in the process of being modernized. Instead of clearing the entire build-

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ing while the work was going on, they were doing it an apartment at a time, in order to lose as little rental income as possible. Of the six rearward apartments it offered to view, the topmost one had already been completed, but not yet rented. They were working on the fifth-floor one now, disturbing the peace of everyone all up and down the "inside" of the block with their hammering and sawing.

I felt sorry for the couple in the apartment below. I used to wonder how they stood it with that bedlam going on above their heads. To make it worse the wife was in chronic poor health, too; I could tell that even at a distance by the listless way she moved about over there, and remained in her bathrobe without dressing. Sometimes I'd see her sitting by the window, holding her head. I used to wonder why he didn't have a doctor in to look her over, but maybe they couldn't afford it. He seemed to be out of work.

Often their bedroom light was on late at night behind the drawn shade, as though she were unwell and he was sitting up with her. And one night in particular he must have had to sit up with her all night, it remained on until nearly daybreak. Not that I sat watching all that time. But the light was still burning at three in the morning, when I finally transferred from chair to bed to see if I could get a little sleep myself. And when I failed to, and hopscotched back again around dawn, it was still peering wanly out behind the tan shade.

Moments later, with the first brightening of day, it suddenly dimmed around the edges of the shade, and then shortly afterward, not that one, but a shade in one of the other rooms—for all of them alike had been down—went up, and I saw him standing there looking out.

He was holding a cigarette in his hand. I couldn't see it, but I could tell it was that by the quick, nervous little jerks with which he kept putting his hand to his mouth, and the haze I saw rising around his head. Worried about her, I guess. I didn't blame him for that. Any husband would have been. She must have only just dropped off to sleep, after night-long suffering. And then in another hour or so, at the most, that sawing of wood and clattering of buckets was going to start in over them again. Well, it wasn't any of my business, I said to myself, but he really ought to get her out of there. If I had an ill wife on my hands . . .

He was leaning slightly out, maybe an inch past the window frame, carefully scanning the back faces of all the houses abutting on the hollow square that lay before him. You can tell, even at a distance, when a person is looking fixedly. There's something about

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the way the head is held. And yet his scrutiny wasn't held fixedly to any one point, it was a slow, sweeping one, moving along the houses on the opposite side from me first. When it got to the end of them, I knew it would cross over to my side and come back along there. Before it did, I withdrew several yards inside my room, to let it go safely by. I didn't want him to think I was sitting there prying into his affairs. There was still enough blue night-shade in my room to keep my slight withdrawal from catching his eye.

When I returned to my original position a moment or two later, he was gone. He had raised two more of the shades. The bedroom one was still down. I wondered vaguely why he had given that peculiar, comprehensive, semicircular stare at all the rear windows around him. There wasn't anyone at any of them; at such an hour.

It wasn't important, of course. It was just a little oddity, it failed to blend in with his being worried or disturbed about his wife. When you're worried or disturbed, that's an internal preoccupation; you stare vacantly at nothing at all. When you stare around you in a great sweeping arc at windows, that betrays external preoccupation, outward interest. One doesn't quite jibe with the other. To call such a discrepancy trifling is to add to its importance. Only someone like me, stewing in a vacuum of total idleness, would have noticed it at all.

The apartment remained lifeless after that, as far as could be judged by its windows. He must have either gone out or gone to bed himself. Three of the shades remained at normal height, and the one masking the bedroom remained down. Sam, my day houseman, came in not long after with my eggs and morning paper, and I had that to kill time with for a while. I stopped thinking about other people's windows and staring at them.

The sun slanted down on one side of the hollow oblong all morning long, then it shifted over to the other side for the afternoon. Then it started to slip off both alike, and it was evening again—another day gone.

The lights started to come on around the quadrangle. Here and there a wall played back, like a sounding board, a snatch of radio or TV program that was coming in too loud. If you listened carefully you could hear an occasional clink of dishes mixed in, faint, far off. The chain of little habits that were their lives unreeled themselves. They were all bound in them tighter than the tightest strait jacket any jailer ever devised, though they all thought themselves free.

The jitterbugs made their nightly dash for the great open spaces, forgot their lights, he came careen-

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ing back, thumbed them out, and their place was dark until the early morning hours.

The woman put her child to bed, leaned mournfully over its cot, then sat down with heavy despair to redden her mouth.

In the fourth-floor apartment at right angles to the long interior "street" the three shades had remained up, and the fourth shade had remained at full length, all day long. I hadn't been conscious of that because I hadn't particularly been looking at it, or thinking of it, until now. My eyes may have rested on those windows at times, during the day, but my thoughts had been elsewhere. It was only when a light suddenly went on up in the end room behind one of the raised shades, which was their kitchen, that I realized that the shades had been untouched like that all day.

That also brought something else to my mind that hadn't been in it until now: I hadn't seen the woman all day. I hadn't seen any sign of life within those windows until now.

He'd come in from outside. The entrance was at the opposite side of their kitchen, away from the window. He'd left his hat on, so I knew he'd just come in from the outside.

He didn't remove his hat. As though there was no one there to remove it for any more. Instead, he pushed it farther to the back of his head by pronging a hand to the roots of his hair. That gesture didn't denote removal of perspiration, I knew. To do that a person makes a sidewise sweep—this was up over his forehead. It indicated some sort of harassment or uncertainty. Besides, if he'd been suffering from excess warmth, the first thing he would have done would be to take off his hat altogether.

She didn't come out to greet him. The first link, of the so-strong chain of habit, of custom, that binds us all, had snapped wide-open.

She must be so ill that she had remained in bed, in the room behind the lowered shade, all day. I watched. He remained where he was, two rooms away from there. Expectancy became surprise, surprise incomprehension. Funny, I thought, that he doesn't go in to her. Or at least go as far as the doorway and look in to see how she is.

Maybe she was asleep, and he didn't want to disturb her. Then immediately: but how can he know for sure that she's asleep, without at least looking in at her? He just came in himself.

He walked forward and stood there by the window, as he had at dawn. Sam had carried out my tray quite some time before, and my lights were out. I held my ground; I knew he couldn't see me within the darkness of the bay window. He stood there motion-

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less for several minutes. And now his attitude was the proper one for inner preoccupation. He stood there looking downward at nothing, lost in thought.

He's worried about her, I said to myself, as any man would be. It's the most natural thing in the world. Funny, though, he should leave her in the dark like that, without going near her. If he's worried, then why didn't he at least look in on her on returning? Here was another of those trivial discrepancies, between inward motivation and outward indication.

And just as I was thinking that, the original one, that I had noted at daybreak, repeated itself. His head went up with renewed alertness, and I could see it start to give that slow circular sweep of interrogation around the panorama of rearward windows again.

True, the light was behind him this time, but there was enough of it falling on him to show me the microscopic but continuous shift of direction his head made in the process. I remained carefully immobile until the distant glance had passed me safely by. Motion attracts.

Why is he so interested in other people's windows, I wondered detachedly. And of course an effective brake to dwelling on that thought too lingeringly clamped down almost at once: look who's talking. What about you yourself?

An important difference escaped me. I wasn't worried about anything. He, presumably, was.

Down came the shades again. The lights stayed on behind their beige opaqueness. But behind the one that had remained down all along, the room remained dark.

Time went by. Hard to say how much—a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes. A cricket chirped in one of the back yards. Sam came in to see if I wanted anything before he went home for the night. I told him no, I didn't—it was all right, run along. He stood there for a minute, head down. Then I saw him shake it slightly, as if at something he didn't like.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"You know what that means? My old mammy told it to me, and she never told me a lie in her life. I never once seen it to miss, either."

"What, the cricket?"

"Any time you hear one of them things, that's a sign of death—some place close around."

I swept the back of my hand at him. "Well, it isn't in here, so don't let it worry you."

He went out, muttering stubbornly. "It's somewhere close by, though. Somewhere not very far off. Got to be."

The door closed after him, and I stayed there alone in the dark.

It was a stifling night, much closer than the preceding one. I could hardly get a breath of air even by the open window at which I sat. I wondered how he—that un-

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known over there—could stand it behind those drawn shades.

Then suddenly, just as idle speculation about this whole matter was about to alight on some fixed point in my mind, crystallize into something like suspicion, up came the shades again, and off it flitted, as formless as ever and without having had a chance to come to rest on anything.

He was in the middle windows, the living room. He'd taken off his coat and shirt, was bare-armed in his undershirt. He hadn't been able to stand it himself, I guess—the sultriness.

I couldn't make out what he was doing at first. He seemed to be busy in a perpendicular, up-and-down way rather than lengthwise. He remained in one place, but he kept dipping down out of sight and then straightening up into view again, at irregular intervals. It was almost like some sort of calisthenic exercise, except that the dips and rises weren't evenly timed enough for that. Sometimes he'd stay down a long time, sometimes he'd bob right up again, sometimes he'd go down two or three times in rapid succession.

There was some sort of wide-spread black V railing him off from the window. Whatever it was, there was just a sliver of it showing above the upward inclination to which the window sill deflected my line of vision. All it did was strike off the bottom of his undershirt, to the extent of an inch maybe. But I hadn't seen it there at other times, and I couldn't tell what it was.

Suddenly he left it for the first time since the shades had gone up, came out around it to the outside, stooped down into another part of the room, and straightened again with an armful of what looked like varicolored pennants at the distance at which I was. He went back behind the V and allowed them to fall across the top of it for a moment, and stay that way. He made one of his dips down out of sight and stayed that way a good while.

The "pennants" slung across the V kept changing color right in front of my eyes. I have very good sight. One moment they were white, the next red, the next blue.

Then I got it. They were a woman's dresses, and he was pulling them down to him one by one, taking the topmost one each time. Suddenly they were all gone, the V was black and bare again, and his torso had reappeared.

I knew what it was now, and what he was doing. The dresses had told me. He confirmed it for me. He spread his arms to the ends of the V, and I could see him heave and hitch, as if exerting pressure, and suddenly the V had folded up, become a cubed wedge. Then he made rolling motions with his upper body, and the wedge disappeared off to one side.

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He'd been packing a trunk, packing his wife's things into a large upright trunk.

He reappeared at the kitchen window presently, stood still for a moment. I saw him draw his arm across his forehead, not once but several times, and then whip the end of it off into space. Sure, it was hot work for such a night. Then he reached up along the wall and took something down. Since it was the kitchen he was in, my imagination had to supply a cabinet and a bottle.

I could see the two or three quick passes his hand made to his mouth after that. I said to myself tolerantly: that's what nine men out of ten would do after packing a trunk—take a good stiff drink. And if the tenth didn't, it would only be because he didn't have any liquor at hand.

Then he came closer to the window again, and standing edgewise to the side of it, so that only a thin paring of his head and shoulder showed, peered watchfully out into the dark quadrilateral, along the line of windows, most of them unlighted by now, once more. He always started on the left-hand side, the side opposite mine, and made his circuit of inspection from there on around.

That was the second time in one evening I'd seen him do that. And once at daybreak, made three times altogether. I smiled mentally. You'd almost think he felt guilty about something. It was probably nothing, just an odd little habit, a quirk, that he didn't know he had himself. I had them myself; everyone does.

He withdrew into the room again, and it blacked out. His figure passed into the one that was still lighted next to it, the living room. That blacked out next. It didn't surprise me that the third room, the bedroom with the drawn shade, didn't light up on his entering there. He wouldn't want to disturb her, of course—particularly if she was going away tomorrow for her health, as his packing of her trunk showed. She needed all the rest she could get, before making the trip. Simple enough for him to slip into bed in the dark.

It did surprise me, though, when a match flare winked some time later, to have it still come from the darkened living room. He must be lying down in there, trying to sleep on a sofa or something for the night. He hadn't gone near the bedroom at all, was staying out of it altogether. That puzzled me, frankly. That was carrying solicitude almost too far.

Ten minutes or so later, there was another match wink, still from that same living-room window. He couldn't sleep.

The night brooded down on both of us alike, the curiosity-monger in the bay window, the chain smoker in the fourth-floor apartment, without giving any an-

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swer. The only sound was that interminable cricket.

I was back at the window again with the first sun of morning. Not because of him. My mattress was like a bed of hot coals. Sam found me there when he came in to get things ready for me. "You're going to be a wreck, Mr. Jeff," was all he said.

First, for a while, there was no sign of life over there. Then suddenly I saw his head bob up from somewhere down out of sight in the living room, so I knew I'd been right; he'd spent the night on a sofa or easy chair in there. Now, of course, he'd look in at her, to see how she was, find out if she felt any bettter. That was only common ordinary humanity. He hadn't been near her, so far as I could make out, since two nights before.

He didn't. He dressed and went in the opposite direction, into the kitchen, and wolfed something in there, standing up and using both hands. Then he suddenly turned and moved off side, in the direction in which I knew the entrance to be, as if he had just heard some summons, like the doorbell.

Sure enough, in a moment he came back, and there were two men with him in leather aprons. Expressmen. I saw him standing by while they laboriously maneuvered that cubed black wedge out between them, in the direction they'd just come from. He did more than just stand by. He practically hovered over them, kept shifting from side to side, he was so anxious to see that it was done right.

Then he came back alone, and I saw him swipe his arm across his head, as though it was he, not they, who was all heated up from the effort.

So he was forwarding her trunk, to wherever it was she was going. That was all.

He reached up along the wall again and took something down. He was taking another drink. Two. Three. I said to myself, a little at a loss: yes, but he hasn't just packed a trunk this time. That trunk has been standing packed and ready since last night. Where does the hard work come in, the sweat and the need for a bracer?

Now, at last, after all those hours, he finally did go in to her. I saw his form pass through the living room and go beyond, into the bedroom. Up went the shade that had been down all this time. Then he turned his head and looked around behind him. In a certain way, a way that was unmistakable, even from where I was. Not in one certain direction, as one looks at a person. But from side to side, and up and down, and all around, as one looks at—*an empty room.*

He stepped back, bent a little, gave a fling of his arms, and an unoccupied mattress and bedding upended over the foot of a bed, stayed that way, emptily curved. A

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second one followed a moment later.

She wasn't in there.

They use the expression "delayed action." I found out then what it meant. For two days a sort of formless uneasiness, disembodied suspicion, I don't know what to call it, had been flitting and volplaning around in my mind, like an insect looking for a landing place. More than once, just as it had been ready to settle, some slight thing, some slight reassuring thing, such as the raising of the shades after they had been down unnaturally long, had been enough to keep it winging aimlessly, to prevent it from staying still long enough for me to recognize it.

The point of contact had been there all along, waiting to receive it. Now, for some reason, within a split second after he tossed over the empty mattresses, it landed—*zoom!* And the point of contact expanded, or exploded, whatever you care to call it, into a certainty of—*murder.*

In other words, the rational part of my mind was far behind the instinctive, subconscious part. Delayed action. Now the one had caught up to the other. The thought message that sparked from the synchronization was: he's done something to her!

I looked down and my hand was bunching the fabric over my kneecap, it was knotted so tight. I forced it to open. I said to myself, steadyingly: Now wait a minute, be careful, go slow. You've seen nothing. You know nothing. You only have the negative proof that you don't see her any more.

Sam was standing there looking over at me from the pantryway. He said accusingly, "You ain't touched a thing. And your face looks like a sheet."

It felt like one. It had that needling feeling, when the blood has left it involuntarily. It was more to get him out of the way and give myself some elbow room for undisturbed thinking than anything else that I said, "Sam, what's the street address of that building down there? Don't stick your head too far out and gape at it."

"'Somep'n or other Benedict Avenue." He scratched his neck helpfully.

"I know that. Chase around the corner a minute and get me the exact number on it, will you?"

"Why you want to know that for?" he asked as he turned to go.

"None of your business," I said with the good-natured firmness that was all that was necessary to take care of that once and for all. I called after him just as he was closing the door, "And while you're about it, step into the entrance and see if you can tell from the mailboxes who has the fourth-floor rear. Don't get me the wrong one now. And try not to let anyone catch you at it."

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He went out mumbling something that sounded like, "When a man ain't got nothing to do but just sit all day, he sure can think up the blamest things—"

The door closed and I settled down to some good constructive thinking.

I said to myself: What are you really building up this monstrous supposition on? Let's see what you've got. Only that there were several little things wrong with the mechanism, the chain belt, of their recurrent daily habits over there.

1. The lights were on all night the first night.

2. He came in later than usual the second night.

3. He left his hat on.

4. She didn't come out to greet him—she hasn't appeared since the evening before the lights were on all night.

5. He took a drink after he finished packing her trunk. But he took three stiff drinks the next morning, immediately after her trunk went out.

6. He was inwardly disturbed and worried, yet superimposed on this was an unnatural external concern about the surrounding rear windows that was off-key.

7. He slept in the living room, didn't go near the bedroom, during the night before the departure of the trunk.

Very well. If she had been ill that first night, and he had sent her away for her health, that automatically canceled out points 1, 2, 3, and 4. It left points 5 and 6 totally unimportant and unincriminating. But when it came up against 7, it hit a stumbling block.

If she went away immediately after being ill that first night, why didn't he want to sleep in their bedroom *last night?* Sentiment? Hardly. Two perfectly good beds in one room, only a sofa or uncomfortable easy chair in the other. Why should he stay out of there if she was already gone? Just because he missed her, was lonely? A grown man doesn't act that way. All right, then she was still in there.

Sam came back at this point and said, "That house is Number 525 Benedict Avenue. The fourth-floor rear, it got the name of Mr. and Mrs. Lars Thorwald up."

"Sh-h," I silenced, and motioned him backhand out of my sight.

"First he want it, then he don't," he grumbled philosophically, and retired to his duties.

I went ahead digging at it. But if she was still in there, in that bedroom last night, then she couldn't have gone away to the country, because I never saw her leave today. She could have left without my seeing her in the early hours of yesterday morning. I'd missed a few hours, been asleep. But this morning I had been up before he was himself, I only saw his head rear up from that sofa after I'd been at the window for some time.

To go at all she would have had

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to go yesterday morning. Then why had he left the bedroom shade down, left the mattresses undisturbed, until today? Above all, why had he stayed out of that room last night? That was evidence that she hadn't gone, was still in there.

Then today, immediately after the trunk had been dispatched, he went in, pulled up the shade, tossed over the mattresses, and showed that she hadn't been in there. The thing was like a crazy spiral.

No, it wasn't either. *Immediately after the trunk had been dispatched—*

The trunk.

That did it.

I looked around to make sure the door was safely closed between Sam and me. My hand hovered uncertainly over the telephone dial a minute. Boyne, he'd be the one to tell about it. He was on Homicide. He had been, anyway, when I'd last seen him. I didn't want to get a flock of strange dicks and cops into my hair. I didn't want to be involved any more than I had to. Or at all, if possible.

They switched my call to the right place after a couple of wrong tries, and I got him finally.

"Look, Boyne? This is Hal Jeffries—"

"Well, where've you been the last sixty-two years?" he began.

"We can take that up later. What I want you to do now is take down a name and address. Ready? Lars Thorwald. Five twenty-five Benedict Avenue. Fourth-floor rear. Got it?"

"Fourth-floor rear. Got it. What's it for?"

"Investigation. I've got a firm belief you'll uncover a murder there if you start digging at it. Don't call on me for anything more than that—just a conviction. There's been a man and wife living there until now. Now there's just the man. Her trunk went out early this morning. If you can find someone who saw *her* leave—"

Marshaled aloud like that and conveyed to somebody else, a lieutenant of detectives above all, it did sound flimsy, even to me. He said hesitantly, "Well, but—"

Then he accepted it as was. Because I was the source. I even left my window out of it completely. I could do that with him and get away with it because he'd known me for years, he didn't question my reliability. I didn't want my room all cluttered up with dicks and cops taking turns nosing out of the window in this hot weather. Let them tackle it from the front.

"Well, we'll see what we see," he said. "I'll keep you posted."

I hung up and sat back to watch and wait events. I had a grandstand seat. Or rather a grandstand seat in reverse. I could only see from behind the scenes, but not from the front. I couldn't watch Boyne go to work. I could only see the results, when and if there were any.

Nothing happened for the next

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few hours. The police work that I knew must be going on was as invisible as police work should be. The figure in the fourth-floor windows over there remained in sight, alone and undisturbed. He didn't go out. He was restless, roamed from room to room without staying in one place very long, but he stayed in. Once I saw him eating again—sitting down this time—and once he shaved, and once he even tried to read the paper, but he didn't read it long.

Little unseen wheels were in motion around him. Small and harmless as yet, preliminaries. If he knew, I wondered to myself, would he remain there quiescent like that, or would he try to bolt out and flee That mightn't depend so much on his guilt as on his sense of immunity, his feeling that he could outwit them. Of his guilt I myself was already convinced, or I wouldn't have taken the step I had.

At three my phone rang. Boyne calling back. "Jeffries? Well, I don't know. Can't you give me a little more than just a bald statement like that?"

"Why?" I fenced. "Why do I have to?"

"I've had a man over there making inquiries. I've just had his report. The building superintendent and several of the neighbors all agree she left for the country, to try and regain her health, early yesterday morning."

"Wait a minute. Did any of them *see* her leave, according to your man?"

"No."

"Then all you've got is a second-hand version of an unsupported statement by him. Not an eyewitness account."

"He was met returning from the depot after he'd bought her ticket and seen her off on the train."

"That's still an unsupported statement, once removed."

"I've sent a man down there to the station to try and check with the ticket agent if possible. After all, he should have been fairly conspicuous at that early hour. And we're keeping him under observation, of course, in the meantime, watching all his movements. The first chance we get we're going to jump in and search the place."

I had a feeling that they wouldn't find anything, even if they did.

"Don't expect anything more from me. I've dropped it in your lap. I've given you all I have to give. A name, an address, and an opinion."

"Yes, and I've always valued your opinion highly before now, Jeff—"

"But now you don't, that it?"

"Not at all. The thing is, we haven't turned up anything that seems to bear out your impression so far."

"You haven't got very far along, so far."

He went back to his previous

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cliché. "Well, we'll see what we see. Let you know later."

Another hour or so went by, and sunset came on. I saw him start to get ready to go out, over there. He put on his hat, put his hand in his pocket, and stood still looking at it for a minute. Counting change, I guess. It gave me a peculiar sense of suppressed excitement, knowing they were going to come in the minute he left. I thought grimly, as I saw him take a last look around: if you've got anything to hide, brother, now's the time to hide it.

He left. A breath-holding interval of misleading emptiness descended on the apartment. A three-alarm fire couldn't have pulled my eyes off those windows. Suddenly the door by which he had just left parted slightly and two men insinuated themselves, one behind the other. There they were now. They closed it behind them, separated at once, and got busy.

One took the bedroom, one the kitchen, and they started to work their way toward one another again from those extremes of the apartment. They were thorough. I could see them going over everything from top to bottom. They took the living room together. One cased one side, the other man the other.

They'd already finished before the warning caught them. I could tell that by the way they straightened up and stood facing one another frustratedly for a minute. Then both their heads turned sharply, as at a tipoff by doorbell that he was coming back. They got out fast.

I wasn't unduly disheartened; I'd expected that. My own feeling all along had been that they wouldn't find anything incriminating around. The trunk was gone.

He came in with a mountainous brown-paper bag sitting in the curve of one arm. I watched him closely to see if he'd discover that someone had been there in his absence. Apparently he didn't. They'd been adroit about it.

He stayed in the rest of the night. Sat tight, safe and sound. He did some desultory drinking—I could see him sitting there by the window and his hand would hoist every once in a while—but not to excess. Apparently everything was under control, the tension had eased—now that the trunk was out.

Watching him across the night, I speculated: Why doesn't he get out? If I'm right about him, and I am, why does he stick around—after it? That brought its own answer: Because he doesn't know anyone's on to him yet. He doesn't think there's any hurry. To go too soon, right after she has, would be more dangerous than to stay a while.

The night wore on. I sat there waiting for Boyne's call. It came later than I thought it would.

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picked the phone up in the dark. He was getting ready to go to bed, over there, now. He'd risen from where he'd been sitting drinking in the kitchen, and put the light out. He went into the living room, lit that. He started to pull his shirt-tail up out of his belt. Boyne's voice was in my ear as my eyes were on him, over there. Three-cornered arrangement.

"Hello, Jeff? Listen, absolutely nothing. We searched the place while he was out—"

I nearly said, "I know you did, I saw it," but checked myself in time.

"—and didn't turn up a thing. But—" He stopped as though this was going to be important. I waited impatiently for him to go ahead.

"Downstairs in his letter box we found a post card waiting for him. We fished it up out of the slot with bent pins—"

"And?"

"And it was from his wife, written only yesterday from some farm up-country. Here's the message we copied: 'Arrived O.K. Already feeling a little better. Love, Anna.'"

I said faintly but stubbornly, "You say, written only yesterday. Have you proof of that? What was the postmark date on it?"

He made a disgusted sound down in his tonsils. At me, not it. "The postmarked was blurred. A corner of it got wet and the ink smudged."

"All of it blurred?"

"The year date," he admitted. "The hour and the month came out okay. August. And seven thirty P.M., it was mailed at."

This time I made the disgusted sound, in my larynx. "August, seven thirty P.M.—1937 or 1939 or 1942. You have no proof how it got into that mail box, whether it came from a letter carrier's pouch or from the back of some bureau drawer!"

"Give up, Jeff," he said. "There's such a thing as going too far."

I don't know what I would have said. That is, if I hadn't happened to have my eyes on the Thorwald living-room windows just then. Probably very little. The post card *had* shaken me, whether I admitted it or not. But I was looking over there. The light had gone out as soon as he'd taken his shirt off. But the bedroom didn't light up. A match flare winked from the living room, low down, as from an easy chair or sofa. With two unused beds in the bedroom, he was *still staying out of there.*

"Boyne," I said in a glassy voice, "I don't care what post cards from the other world you've turned up, I say that man has done away with his wife! Trace that trunk he shipped out. Open it up when you've located it—and I think you'll find her!"

And I hung up without waiting to hear what he was going to do about it. He didn't ring back, so I

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suspected he was going to give my suggestion a spin after all, in spite of his loudly proclaimed skepticism.

I stayed there by the window all night, keeping a sort of deathwatch. There were two more match flares after the first, at about half-hour intervals. Nothing more after that. So possibly he was asleep over there. Possibly not. I had to sleep some time myself, and I finally succumbed in the flaming light of the early sun. Anything that he was going to do, he would have done under cover of darkness and not waited for broad daylight. There wouldn't be anything much to watch, for a while now. And what was there that he needed to do any more anyway? Nothing, just sit tight and let a little disarming time slip by.

It seemed like five minutes later that Sam came over and touched me, but it was already high noon. I said irritably, "Didn't you see that note I pinned up, for you to let me sleep?"

He said, "Yeah, but it's your old friend Inspector Boyne. I figured you'd sure want to—"

It was a personal visit this time. Boyne came into the room behind him without waiting, and without much cordiality.

I said to get rid of Sam, "Go inside and smack a couple of eggs together."

Boyne began in a galvanized-iron voice. "Jeff, what do you mean by doing anything like this to me? I've made a fool out of myself, thanks to you. Sending my men out right and left on wild-goose chases. Thank God, I didn't put my foot in it any worse than I did, and have this guy picked up and brought in for questioning."

"Oh, then you don't think that's necessary?" I suggested dryly.

The look he gave me took care of that. "I'm not alone in the department, you know. There are men over me I'm accountable to for my actions. That looks great, don't it, sending one of my fellows one-half-a-day's train ride up into the sticks to some godforsaken whistle stop or other at departmental expense—"

"Then you located the trunk?"

"We traced it through the express agency," he said flintily.

"And you opened it?"

"We did better than that. We got in touch with the various farmhouses in the immediate locality, and Mrs. Thorwald came down to the junction in a produce truck from one of them and opened it herself, with her own keys!"

Very few men have ever got a look from an old friend like the one I got from him. At the door he said, stiff as a rifle barrel, "Just let's forget all about it, shall we? That's about the kindest thing either one of us can do for the other. You're not yourself, and I'm out a little of my own pocket money, time, and temper. Let's let it go at

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that. If you want to telephone me in future I'll be glad to give you my home number."

The door went *whopp!* behind him.

For about ten minutes after he stormed out, my numbed mind was in a sort of strait jacket. Then it started to wriggle its way free. The hell with the police. I can't prove it to them, maybe, but I can prove it to myself, one way or the other, once and for all. Either I'm wrong or I'm right. He's got his armor on against them. But his back is naked and unprotected against me.

I called Sam in. "Whatever became of that spyglass we used to have when we were bumming around on that cabin cruiser?"

He found it some place downstairs and came in with it, blowing on it and rubbing it along his sleeve. I let it lie idle in my lap first. I took a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote six words on it: *What have you done with her?*

I sealed it in an envelope and left the envelope blank. I said to Sam, "Now here's what I want you to do, and I want you to be slick about it. You take this, go in that building 525, climb the stairs to the fourth-floor rear, and ease it under the door. You're fast, at least you used to be. Let's see if you're fast enough to keep from being caught at it. Then when you get safely down again, give the outside doorbell a little poke, to attract attention."

His mouth started to open.

"And don't ask me any questions, you understand? I'm not fooling."

He went, and I got the spyglass ready.

I got him in the right focus after a moment or two. A face leaped up, and I was really seeing him for the first time. Dark-haired, but unmistakable Scandinavian ancestry. Looked like a sinewy customer, although he didn't run to much bulk.

About five minutes went by. His head turned sharply, profileward. That was the bell poke, right there. The note must be in already.

He gave me the back of his head as he went toward the door. The lens could follow him all the way to the rear, where my unaided eyes hadn't been able to before.

He opened the door first, missed seeing it, looked out on a level. He closed it. Then he dipped, straightened up. He had it. I could see him turning it this way and that.

He shifted in, away from the door, nearer the window. He thought danger lay near the door, safety away from it. He didn't know it was the other way around; the deeper into his own rooms he retreated the greater the danger.

He'd torn it open, he was reading it. God, how I watched his expression. My eyes clung to it like leeches. There was a sudden widening, a pulling—the whole skin of his face seemed to stretch back behind the ears, narrowing his eyes.

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Shock. Panic. His hand pushed out and found the wall, and he braced himself with it. Then he went back toward the door again slowly.

I could see him creeping up on it, stalking it as though it were something alive. He opened it so slenderly you couldn't see it at all, peered fearfully through the crack. Then he closed it, and he came back, zigzag, off balance from sheer reflex dismay. He toppled into a chair and snatched up a drink. Out of the bottle neck itself this time. And even while he was holding it to his lips, his head was turned looking over his shoulder at the door that had suddenly thrown his secret in his face.

I put the glass down.

Guilty! Guilty as all hell, and the police be damned!

My hand started toward the phone, came back again. What was the use? They wouldn't listen now any more than they had before. "You should have seen his face." And I could hear Boyne's answer: "Anyone gets a jolt from an anonymous letter, true or false. You would yourself." They had a real live Mrs. Thorwald to show me—or thought they had. I'd have to show them the dead one to prove that they both weren't one and the same. I, from my window, had to show them a body.

Well, he'd have to show me first.

It took hours before I got it. I kept pegging away at it, pegging away at it, while the afternoon wore away. Meanwhile he was pacing back and forth there like a caged panther. Two minds with but one thought, turned inside out in my case. How to keep it hidden, how to see that it wasn't kept hidden.

I was afraid he might try to light out, but if he intended doing that he was going to wait until after dark, apparently, so I had a little time yet. Possibly he didn't want to himself, unless he was driven to it—still felt that it was more dangerous than to stay.

The customary sights and sounds around me went on unnoticed, while the mainstream of my thoughts pounded like a torrent against that one obstacle stubbornly damming them up: how to get him to give the location away to me, so that I could give it away in turn to the police.

I was dimly conscious, I remember, of the landlord or somebody bringing in a prospective tenant to look at the sixth-floor apartment, the one that had already been finished. This was two over Thorwald's; they were still at work on the in-between one. At one point an odd little bit of synchronization—completely accidental, of course—cropped up. Landlord and tenant both happened to be near the living-room windows on the sixth at the same moment that Thorwald was near those on the fourth. Both parties moved onward simultaneously, into the kitchen from there,

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and, passing the blind spot of the wall, appeared next at the kitchen windows.

It was uncanny; they were almost like precision strollers or puppets manipulated on one and the same string. It probably wouldn't have happened again just like that in another fifty years. Immediately afterward they digressed, never to repeat themselves like that again.

The thing was, something about it had disturbed me. There had been some slight flaw or hitch to mar its smoothness. I tried for a moment or two to figure out what it had been, and couldn't. The landlord and tenant were gone now, and only Thorwald was in sight. My unaided memory wasn't enough to recapture it for me. My eyesight might have if it had been repeated, but it wasn't.

It sank into my subconscious, to ferment there like yeast, while I went back to the main problem at hand.

I got it finally. It was well after dark, but I finally hit on a way. It mightn't work, it was cumbersome and roundabout, but it was the only way I could think of. An alarmed turn of the head, a quick precautionary step in one certain direction, was all I needed. And to get this brief, flickering, transitory giveaway I needed two phone calls and an absence of about half an hour on his part between them.

I leafed a directory by matchlight until I'd found what I wanted: *Thorwald, Lars. 525 Bndct. . . . SWansea 5-2114*

I blew out the match, picked up the phone in the dark. It was like television. I could see to the other end of my call, only not along the wire but by a direct channel of vision from window to window.

He said "Hullo?" gruffly.

I thought: How strange this is. I've been accusing him of murder for three days straight, and only now I'm hearing his voice for the first time.

I didn't try to disguise my own voice. After all, he'd never see me and I'd never see him. I said, "You got my note?"

He said guardedly, "Who is this?"

"Just somebody who happens to know."

He said craftily, "Know what?"

"Know what you know. You and I, we're the only ones."

He controlled himself well. I didn't hear a sound. But he didn't know he was open another way too. I had the spyglass balanced there at proper height on two large books on the sill. Through the window I saw him pull open the collar of his shirt as though its stricture was intolerable. Then he backed his hand over his eyes the way you do when there's a light blinding you.

His voice came back firmly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Business, that's what I'm talking about. It should be worth some-

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thing to me, shouldn't it? To keep it from going any further." I wanted to keep him from catching on that it was the windows. I still needed them, I needed them now more than ever. "You weren't very careful about your door the other night. Or maybe the draft swung it open a little."

That hit him where he lived. Even the stomach heave reached me over the wire. "You didn't see anything. There wasn't anything to see."

"It's up to you. Why should I go to the police?" I coughed a little. "If it would pay me not to."

"Oh," he said. And there was relief of a sort in it. "D'you want to—see me? Is that it?"

"That would be the best way, wouldn't it? How much can you bring with you for now?"

"I've only got about seventy dollars around here."

"All right, then we can arrange the rest for later. Do you know where Lakeside Park is? I'm near there now. Suppose we make it there." That was about thirty minutes away—fifteen there and fifteen back. "There's a little pavilion as you go in."

"How many of you are there?" he asked cautiously.

"Just me. It pays to keep things to yourself. That way you don't have to divvy up."

He seemed to like that too. "I'll take a run out," he said, "just to see what it's all about."

I watched him more closely than ever, after he'd hung up. He flitted straight through to the end room, the bedroom, that he didn't go near any more. He disappeared into a clothes closet in there, stayed a minute, came out again. He must have taken something out of a hidden cranny or niche in there that even the dicks had missed. I could tell by the piston-like motion of his hand, just before it disappeared inside his coat, what it was. A gun.

It's a good thing, I thought, I'm not out there in Lakeside Park waiting for my $70.

The place blacked out and he was on his way.

I called Sam in. "I want you to do something for me that's a little risky—in fact, damn risky. You might break a leg, or you might get shot, or you might even get pinched. We've been together ten years, and I wouldn't ask you anything like that if I could do it myself. But I can't, and it's got to be done."

Then I told him. "Go out the back way, cross the back-yard fences, and see if you can get into that fourth-floor apartment up the fire escape. He's left one of the windows down a little from the top."

"What do you want me to look for?"

"Nothing." The police had been there already, so what was the good of that? "There are three rooms over there. I want you to disturb

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everything just a little bit, in all three, to show someone's been in there. Turn up the edge of each rug a little, shift every chair and table around a little, leave the closet doors standing out. Don't pass up a thing. Here, keep your eyes on this."

I took off my wrist watch, strapped it on him. "You've got twenty-five minutes, starting from now. If you stay within those twenty-five minutes, nothing will happen to you. When you see they're up, don't wait any longer—get out and get out fast."

"Climb back down?"

"No." He wouldn't remember, in his excitement, if he'd left the windows up or not. And I didn't want him to connect danger with the back of his place, but with the front. I wanted to keep my own window out of it. "Latch the window down tight, let yourself out the door, and beat it out of the building the front way, for your life!"

"I'm just an easy mark for you," he said ruefully, but he went.

He came out through our own basement door below me and scrambled over the fences. If anyone had challenged him from one of the surrounding windows, I was going to backstop for him, explain I'd sent him down to look for something. But no one did. He made it pretty good for someone his age—he isn't so young any more. Even the fire escape backing the apartment, which was drawn up short, he managed to contact by standing on something. He got in, lit the light, looked over at me. I motioned him to go ahead, not to weaken.

I watched him at it. There wasn't any way I could protect him now that he was in there. Even Thorwald would be within his rights in shooting him down—this was break-and-entry. I had to stay behind the scenes, as I had been all along. I couldn't get out in front of him as a lookout and shield him. Even the dicks had had a lookout posted.

He must have been tense doing it. I was twice as tense, watching him do it. The twenty-five minutes took fifty to go by. Finally he came over to the window, latched it fast. The lights went, and he was out. He'd made it. I blew out a bellyful of breath that was twenty-five minutes old.

I heard him keying the street door, and when he came up I said warningly, "Leave the light out in here. Go and build yourself a great big whiskey punch; you're as close to white as you'll ever be."

Thorwald came back twenty-nine minutes after he'd left for Lakeside Park. A pretty slim margin to hang a man's life on. So now for the finale of the long-winded business, and here was hoping. I got my second phone call in before he had time to notice anything amiss. It was tricky timing but I'd

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been sitting there with the receiver ready in my hand, dialing the number over and over, then killing it each time. He came in on the 2 of 5-2114, and I saved that much time. The ring started before his hand came away from the light switch.

This was the one that was going to tell the story.

"You were supposed to bring money, not a gun; that's why I didn't show up." I saw the jolt that threw into him. The window still had to stay out of it. "I saw you tap the inside of your coat, where you had it, as you came out on the street." Maybe he hadn't, but he wouldn't remember by now whether he had or not. You usually do when you're packing a gun and aren't an habitual carrier.

"Too bad you had your trip out and back for nothing. I didn't waste my time while you were gone, though. I know more now than I knew before." This was the important part. I had the spyglass up and I was practically fluoroscoping him. "I'v found out where —it is. You know what I mean. I know now where you've got—it. I was there while you were out."

Not a word. Just quick breathing.

"Don't you believe me? Look around. Put the receiver down and take a look for yourself. I found it."

He put it down, moved as far as the living-room entrance, and touched off the lights. He just looked around him once, in a sweeping, all-embracing stare, that didn't come to a head on any one fixed point, didn't center at all.

He was smiling grimly when he came back to the phone. All he said, softly and with malignant satisfaction, was: "You're a liar."

Then I saw him lay the receiver down and take his hand off it. I hung up at my end.

The test had failed. And yet it hadn't. He hadn't given the location away as I'd hoped he would. And yet that "You're a liar" was a tacit admission that it was there to be found, somewhere around him, somewhere on those premises. In such a good place that he didn't have to worry about it, didn't even have to look to make sure.

So there was a kind of sterile victory in my defeat. But it wasn't worth a damn to me.

He was standing there with his back to me and I couldn't see what he was doing. I knew the phone was somewhere in front of him, but I thought he was just standing there pensive behind it. His head was slightly lowered, that was all. I'd hung up at my end. I didn't even see his elbow move. And if his index finger did, I couldn't see it.

He stood like that a moment or two, then finally he moved aside. The lights went out over there; I lost him. He was careful not even to strike matches, as he sometimes did in the dark.

My mind no longer distracted

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by having him to look at, I turned to trying to recapture something else—that troublesome little hitch in synchronization that had occurred this afternoon, when the renting agent and he both moved simultaneously from one window to the next. The closest I could get was this: it was like when you're looking at someone through a pane of imperfect glass, and a flaw in the glass distorts the symmetry of the reflected image for a second, until it has gone on past that point. Yet that wouldn't do, that was not it. The windows had been open and there had been no glass between. And I hadn't been using the lens.

My phone rang. Boyne, I supposed. It wouldn't be anyone else at this hour. Maybe, after reflecting on the way he'd jumped all over me— I said "Hello" unguardedly, in my own normal voice.

There wasn't any answer.

I said, "Hello? Hello? Hello?" I kept giving away samples of my voice.

There wasn't a sound from first to last.

I hung up finally. It was still dark over there, I noticed.

Sam looked in to check out. He was a bit thick-tongued from his restorative drink. He said something about "Awri' if I go now?" I half-heard him. I was trying to figure out another way of trapping *him* over there into giving away the right spot. I motioned my consent absently.

He went a little unsteadily down the stairs to the ground floor and after a delaying moment or two I heard the street door close after him. Poor Sam, he wasn't much used to liquor.

I was left alone in the house, one chair the limit of my freedom of movement.

Suddenly a light went on over there again, just momentarily, to go right out again afterward. He must have needed it for something, to locate something that he had already been looking for and found he wasn't able to put his hands on readily without it. He found it, whatever it was, almost immeditely, and moved back at once to put the lights out again. As he turned to do so, I saw him give a glance out the window. He didn't come to the window to do it, he just shot it out in passing.

Something about it struck me as different from any of the others I'd seen him give in all the time I'd been watching him. If you can qualify such an elusive thing as a glance, I would have termed it a glance with a purpose. It was certainly anything but random, it had a bright spark of fixity in it. It wasn't one of those precautionary sweeps I'd seen him give, either. It hadn't started over on the other side and worked its way around to my side, the right. It had hit dead-center at my bay window, for just a split second while it lasted, and then was gone again. And the

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lights were gone, and he was gone.

Sometimes your senses take things in without your mind translating them into their proper meaning. My eyes saw that look. My mind refused to smelter it properly. "It was meaningless," I thought. "An unintentional bull's eye that just happened to hit square over here as he went toward the lights on his way out."

Delayed action. A wordless ring of the phone. To test a voice. A period of bated darkness following that, in which two could have played at the same game—stalking one another's window squares, unseen. A last-moment flicker of the lights—that was bad strategy but unavoidable. A parting glance, radioactive with malignant intention. All these things sank in without fusing. My eyes did their job, it was my mind that didn't—or at least took its time about it.

Seconds went by in packages of sixty. It was very still around the familiar quadrangle formed by the back of the houses. A sort of breathless stillness. And then a sound came into it, starting up from nowhere, nothing. The unmistakable, spaced clicking a cricket makes in the silence of the night. I thought of Sam's superstition about them, that he claimed had never failed to fulfill itself yet. If that was the case, it looked bad for somebody in one of these slumbering houses around here—

Sam had been gone only about ten minutes. And now he was back again, he must have forgotten something. That drink was responsible. Maybe his hat, or maybe even the key to his own quarters uptown. He knew I couldn't come down and let him in, and he was trying to be quiet about it, thinking perhaps I'd dozed off. All I could hear was this faint jiggling down at the lock of the front door.

It was one of those old-fashioned stoop houses, with an outer pair of storm doors that were allowed to swing free all night, and then a small vestibule, and then the inner door, worked by a simple iron key. The liquor had made his hand a little unreliable, although he'd had this difficulty once or twice before, even without it. A match would have helped him find the keyhole quicker, but then, Sam doesn't smoke. I knew he wasn't likely to have one on him.

The sound had stopped now. He must have given up, gone away again, decided to let whatever it was go until tomorrow. He hadn't got in, because I knew his noisy way of letting doors coast shut by themselves too well, and there hadn't been any sound of that sort, that loose slap he always made.

Then suddenly it exploded. Why at this particular moment, I don't know. That was some mystery of the inner workings of my own mind. It flashed like waiting gunpowder which a spark has finally

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reached along a slow train. Drove all thoughts of Sam, and the front door, and this and that completely out of my head. It had been waiting there since midafternoon today, and only now—

More of that delayed action. Damn that delayed action!

The renting agent and Thorwald had both started even from the living room window. An intervening gap of blind wall, and both had reappeared at the kitchen window, still one above the other. But some sort of hitch or flaw or jump had taken place, right there, that bothered me. The eye is a reliable surveyor. There wasn't anything the matter with their timing, it was their parallel-ness, or whatever the word is. The hitch had been vertical, not horizontal. There had been an upward "jump."

Now I had it, now I knew. And it couldn't wait. It was too good. They wanted a body? Now I had one for them.

Angry or not, Boyne would *have* to listen to me now. I didn't waste any time. I dialed his precinct-house then and there in the dark, working the slots in my lap by memory alone. They didn't make much noise going around, just a light click. Not even as distinct as that cricket out there—

"He went home long ago," the desk sergeant said.

This couldn't wait. "All right, give me his home phone number."

He took a minute, came back again, "Trafalgar," he said. Then nothing more.

"Well? Trafalgar what?" Not a sound.

"Hello? Hello?" I tapped it. "Operator, I've been cut off. Give me that party again." I couldn't get her.

I hadn't been cut off. My wire had been cut. That had been too sudden, right in the middle of— And to be cut like that it would have to be done somewhere right here inside the house with me. Outside it went underground.

Delayed action. This time final, fatal, altogether too late. A voiceless ring of the phone. A direction finder of a look from over there. "Sam" seemingly trying to get back in a while ago.

Surely death was somewhere inside the house here with me. And I couldn't move, I couldn't get up out of this chair. Even if I had got through to Boyne just now, that would have been too late. There wasn't time enough now for one of those camera finishes.

I could have shouted out the window to that gallery of sleeping rear-window neighbors around me, I supposed. It would have brought them to the windows. It couldn't have brought them over here in time. By the time they had even figured which particular house it was coming from, it would stop again, be over with.

So I didn't open my mouth. Not because I was brave, but because it was so obviously useless.

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He'd be up in a minute. He must be on the stairs now, although I couldn't hear him. Not even a creak. A creak would have been a relief, would have placed him. This was like being shut up in the dark with the silence of a gliding, coiling cobra somewhere around you.

There wasn't a weapon in the place with me. There were books there on the wall, in the dark, within reach. Me, who never read. The former owner's books. There was a bust of Rousseau or Montesquieu—I'd never been able to decide which. It was a monstrosity, but it too dated from before my occupancy.

I arched my middle upward from the chair seat and clawed desperately up at it. Twice my fingertips slipped off it, then at the third raking I got it to teeter, and the fourth brought it down into my lap, pushing me down into the chair. There was a steamer rug under me. I didn't need it around me in this weather, I'd been using it to soften the seat of the chair. I tugged it out from under and mantled it around me like an Indian brave's blanket.

Then I squirmed far down in the chair, let my head and one shoulder dangle out over the arm, on the side next to the wall. I hoisted the bust to my other, upward shoulder, balanced it there precariously for a second head, blanket tucked around its ears. From the back, in the dark, it would look—I hoped—

I proceeded to breathe adenoidally, like someone in heavy upright sleep. It wasn't hard. My own breath was coming nearly that labored anyway, from tension.

He was good with knobs and hinges and things. I never heard the door open, and this one, unlike the one downstairs, was right behind me. A little eddy of air puffed through the dark at me. I could feel it because my scalp, the real one, was all wet at the roots of the hair.

If it was going to be a knife or head blow, the dodge might give me a second chance; that was the most I could hope for, I knew. My arms and shoulders are hefty. I'd bring him down on me in a bear hug after the first slash or drive, and break his neck or collarbone against me.

If it was going to be a gun, he'd get me anyway in the end. A difference of a few seconds. He had a gun, I knew, that he was going to use on me in the open, over at Lakeside Park. I was hoping that here, indoors, in order to make his own escape more practicable—

Time was up.

The flash of the shot lit up the room for a second, it was so dark. Or at least the corners of it, like flickering, weak lightning. The bust bounced on my shoulder and disintegrated into chunks.

I thought he was jumping up and down on the floor for a minute with frustrated rage. Then when I

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saw him dart by me and lean over the window sill to look for a way out, the sound transferred itself rearward and downward, became a pummeling with hoof and hip at the street door. The camera finish after all. But he still could have killed me five times.

I flung my body down into the narrow crevice between chair arm and wall, but my legs were still up, and so was my head and that one shoulder.

He whirled, fired at me so close that it was like looking a sunrise in the face. I didn't feel it, so—it hadn't hit.

"You—" I heard him grunt to himself. I think it was the last thing he said. The rest of his life was all action, not verbal.

He flung over the sill on one arm and dropped into the yard. Two-story drop. He made it because he missed the cement, landed on the sod strip in the middle. I jacked myself up over the chair arm and flung myself bodily forward at the window, nearly hitting it chin first.

He went all right. When life depends on it, you go. He took the first fence, rolled over that bellyward. He went over the second like a cat, hands and feet pointed together in a spring. Then he was back in the rear yard of his own building. He got up on something, just about as Sam had— The rest was all footwork, with quick little corkscrew twists at each landing stage. Sam had latched his windows down when he was over there, but he'd reopened one of them for ventilation on his return. His whole life depended now on that casual, unthinking little act—

Second, third. He was up to his own windows. He'd made it. Something went wrong. He veered out away from them in another pretzel twist, flashed up toward the fifth, the one above. Something sparked in the darkness of one of his own windows where he'd been just now, and a shot thudded heavily out around the quadrangle enclosure like a big bass drum.

He passed the fifth, the sixth, got up to the roof. He'd made it a second time. By George, he loved life! The guys in his own windows couldn't get him; he was over them in a straight line and there was too much fire escape interlacing in the way.

I was too busy watching him to watch what was going on around me. Suddenly Boyne was next to me, sighting. I heard him mutter, "I almost hate to do this, he's got to fall so far."

He was balanced on the roof parapet up there, with a star right over his head. An unlucky star. He stayed a minute too long, trying to kill before he was killed. Or maybe he was killed, and knew it.

A shot cracked, high up against the sky, the window pane flew apart all over us, and one of the books snapped right behind me.

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Boyne didn't say anything more about hating to do it. My face was pressing outward against his arm. The recoil of his elbow jarred my teeth. I blew a clearing through the smoke to watch him go.

It was pretty horrible. He took a minute to show anything, standing up there on the parapet. Then he let his gun go, as if to say, "I won't need this any more."

Then he went after it. He missed the fire escape entirely, came all the way down on the outside. He landed so far out he hit one of the projecting planks, down there out of sight. It bounced his body up, like a springboard. Then it landed again —for good. And that was all.

I said to Boyne, "I got it. I got it finally. The fifth-floor flat, the one *over* his, that they're still working on. The cement kitchen floor, raised above the level of the other rooms. They wanted to comply with the fire laws and also get a dropped living-room effect, as cheaply as possible. Dig it up—"

He went right over then and there, down through the basement and over the fences, to save time. The electricity wasn't turned on yet in that one; they had to use their flashlights. It didn't take them long at that, once they'd got started.

In about half an hour he came to the window and wigwagged over for my benefit.

It meant yes.

He didn't come over until nearly eight in the morning; after they had tidied up and taken them away. Both away, the hot dead and the cold dead. He said, "Jeff, I take it all back. That damn fool that I sent up there about the trunk—well, it wasn't his fault, in a way. I'm to blame. He didn't have orders to check on the woman's description, only on the contents of the trunk. He came back and touched on it in a general way. I go home and I'm in bed already, and suddenly pop! into my brain—one of the tenants I questioned two days ago had given us a few details and they didn't tally with his on several important points. Talk about being slow to catch on!"

"I've had that all the way through this damn thing," I admitted ruefully. "I call it delayed action. It nearly killed me."

"I'm a police officer and you're not."

"That how you happened to shine at the right time?"

"Sure. We came over to pick him up for questioning. I left them planted there when we saw he wasn't in and came on over here by myself to square it with you while we were waiting. How did you happen to hit on that cement floor?"

I told him about the freak synchronization. "The renting agent showed up taller at the kitchen window in proportion to Thorwald than he had been a moment before when both were at the living-room

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windows together. It was no secret that they were putting in cement floors, topped by a cork composition, and raising them considerably. But it took on new meaning. Since the top-floor one has been finished for some time, it had to be the fifth. Here's the way I have it lined up, just in theory. She's been in ill health for years, and he's been out of work, and he got sick of that and of her both. Met this other—"

"She'll be here later today, they're bringing her down under arrest."

"He probably insured her for all he could get and then started to poison her slowly, trying not to leave any trace. I imagine—and remember, this is pure conjecture—she caught him at it that night the light was on all night. Caught on in some way, or caught him in the act. He lost his head and did the very thing he had wanted all along to avoid doing. Killed her by violence—strangulation or a blow.

"The rest had to be hastily improvised. He got a better break than he deserved at that. He thought of the apartment upstairs, went up and looked around. They'd just finished laying the floor, the cement hadn't hardened yet, and the materials were still around. He gouged a trough out of it just wide enough to take her body, put her in it, mixed fresh cement, and recemented over her, possibly raising the general level of the flooring an inch or two so that she'd be safely covered. A permanent, odorless coffin.

"Next day the workmen came back, laid down the cork surfacing on top of it without noticing anything—I suppose he'd used one of their own trowels to smooth it. Then he sent his accessory upstate fast, near where his wife had been several summers before, but to a different farmhouse where she wouldn't be recognized, along with the trunk keys. Sent the trunk up after her and dropped himself an already-used post card into his mailbox, with the year date blurred. In a week or two she would have probably committed 'suicide' up there as Mrs. Anna Thorwald. Despondency due to ill health. Written him a farewell note and left her clothes beside some body of deep water. It was risky, but they might have succeeded in collecting the insurance at that."

By nine Boyne and the rest had gone. I was still sitting there in the chair, too keyed up to sleep. Sam came in and said, "Here's Doc Preston."

He showed up rubbing his hands, in that way he has. "Guess we can take that cast off your leg now. You must be tired of sitting there all day doing nothing."

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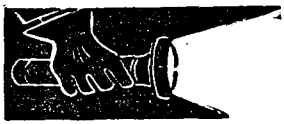

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Well, now we come to it. Of four novels reviewed here last month, two were straight detective stories, one was an action thriller, and only one an uninhibited tale of espionage. On the present occasion, with four more titles to be discussed, no less than three are brilliant forays into the world of spies. And this prompts one inescapable reflection.

With spies all over the place everywhere, several of my critical colleagues have been moved to protest, sometimes with feeling, that we are getting too much of the cloak and dagger. Such complaints, valid enough when the critic has just tripped over a bad book, will never be heard from your obedient servant. Having been addicted to spy stories since the days of E. Phillips Oppenheim, I am hooked on this stuff and can't kick the habit.

But any fondness for espionage needs no defense, not even the defense of a joke. When such a story has been carefully plotted, with strong motivation and a strong central situation to carry all the gunplay, it belongs as legitimately to the field of mystery as does *Trent's Last Case* or *The House of the Arrow*. The best espionage novels will explode a surprise ending after honorably displaying the clues, always the mark of good detective fiction since Poe invented it.

Let's begin with the secret agents and wind up with the murder mystery.

The Danube Runs Red, by Richard Meade (Random House, $4.95) will blow your ears off. Too often, in fiction at least, the American secret agent finds his own government conspiring to embarrass him as much as could any enemy. After shoving the poor devil into a position which might have been devised by the Kremlin itself, the American authorities tell him to find his own way out of it, or else.

Such a dilemma confronts John Allison, that cynical but sympathetic weapons broker with an office in London. After selling (with what he thinks is American approval) a huge load of arms to what should have been the Greater India Company, he finds the weapons have fallen into the wrong hands and disappeared. If he can't get them back in a hurry, it's or else.

While two beautiful women tilt up and down at opposite ends of a see-saw, with Allison reeling between them, the chase begins in Vienna and roars on to Hungary. A stunning surprise finale caught me completely

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off guard, though it may be said without immodesty that Old Ironface has never been a man easy to surprise.

In **A Spy for a Spy,** by Berkely Mather (Scribners, $4.95), we find the heads of British Intelligence as shifty and ruthless as their American counterparts at putting the screws on their own men. James Wainwright, the secret-agent narrator, has been pressurized by his boss into pressurizing a once-Russian, now-naturalized-British art-dealer with a genius for managing prison escapes. The art-dealer must contrive the escape of one Robert Carter, who has served the Chinese Communists before defecting to Russia and then drawing thirty years in a British nick for spying.

Once his escape has been effected, as they plan it, both Wainwright and the art-dealer will smuggle him to Hongkong, where the Chicoms, who want Carter's head for defecting, offer a British prisoner in exchange.

Though they do break Carter out of the sneezer, everything else goes sour. The art-dealer can't or won't leave England; he sends his fiery daughter, Sonia, to substitute for him. Hapless young Wainwright, who keeps beaning Russian agents with bottles when they try to hijack Carter, has even more trouble handling Sonia. The whole tangle is resolved satisfactorily—well, almost satisfactorily—on an island off the China coast. You can't do better than *A Spy for a Spy.*

With **Force 10 from Navarone,** by Alistair MacLean (Doubleday, $4.95), the ever-dependable McMacLean whisks us back to Hitler's War. Three survivors of an Allied team—Keith Mallory, the New Zealand Scot, self-possessed Dusty Miller, and Andrea Stavros, the big Greek—have no sooner wrecked Navarone's guns than they are parachuted into Yugoslavia for further swift footwork behind the German lines.

As Nazi panzers mass to crush seven thousand Yugoslavs in a trap, the trio's ostensible secret mission hides a real secret mission still more hair-raising. Bluff meets double bluff until the moment of truth beside an embattled dam. This is boys' adventure magnified and in technicolor.

No more spies, for now. If you want a detective novel of compelling charm, try Selwyn Jepson's **The Angry Millionaire** (Harper & Row).

Its protagonist, the year's most engaging hero, we first meet as plain John Addis, with a lowly post at London's great merchant bank of Hammond and Morgan. The reader soon learns he is Sir John Addis Hammond, who has inherited a controlling interest in the bank. While acting as chauffeur for that glacial beauty, Victoria Norton, he picks up the track of somebody's gigantic fraud. Sustained by the delightful heroine, Rosemary Stewart, our angry millionaire attacks a problem of both fraud and murder. He wins; we cheer when he wins; who would want it any other way?

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You've heard the expressions "a baseball player's baseball player" and "a writer's writer" and "an actor's actor" (has there ever been "a critic's critic"?). Well, here's a story that might be called "a detective-story reader's detective story." It is also one of the earliest stories (perhaps the first!) about an electronic detective . . .

PROJECT MURDER

by STEVEN PETERS

At ten years of age a monomania seized Harvey Harris, a driving passion for puzzle solving. Anagrams, conundrums, chess problems, mathematical and jigsaw puzzles—they all fascinated him and devoured his time. In his teens Harvey graduated to crossword puzzles, cryptography, Double-Crostics, nim, and the Tower of Brahma. Not many men can turn a boyhood monomania into an adult vocation, but Harvey Harris did. By the time he was 40 years old he earned a comfortable living indulging his sole passion.

Naturally, in those intervening 30 years, there had been some changes. His methods of solution, for instance, matured into extremely complex ones utilizing high-speed computers. One would also have to concede that the puzzles he solved as an adult contained at least a minimum of social value. Harvey happily led a schizophrenic existence in his job at a computer lab, without further sacrifices to maturity.

The ten-year-old Harvey programmed his very expensive electronic toy to play bridge and chess. Once he even set a record with a program that printed out the solution to *The New York Times* Sunday Crossword puzzle in one minute and thirteen seconds. The forty-year-old Harvey, dignified by a Ph.D. in mathematical linguistics, engaged in more serious activities, though still satisfying to his puzzle-solving urge. He performed a useful social function by programming the computer to read one language and render a translation in another.

Since the computer lab where Harvey worked was associated with a large university, employees had to conform to academic dictates, the cardinal one being: "Publish or perish!" Harvey's article, "A Computer Confirmation of Ventris' Decipherment of Linear B Script" duly appeared in the *Journal of Classical Languages* (April 1961). His second article, "Some Minor Modifications in the Recon-

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struction of the Texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls" could be found in the *Journal of Biblical Research* (April 1964).

If by chance you have read these articles, you will understand much about Harvey. His role in life so far had been to confirm or modify (slightly) the creative genius of others. However, that iota of creative potential, hidden in so many, managed to elude Harvey's grasp. Beneath his staid exterior Harvey nursed a secret dream, perhaps also a ten-year-old remnant. In his fantasies the world would one day be stunned by a dramatic, imaginative solution to a major social problem, conceived and executed by Harvey Harris, Ph.D.

Once you know the ethereal scope of Harvey's dream you can appreciate the humiliation inflicted on him by one of his puzzle-solving activities—the reading of murder mysteries. Harvey confessed his mortification one day to John Dalton, director of the computer lab, as the two men hunched over dessert in the cafeteria. Trapped into eating with Harvey by the lack of another available table, Dalton listened, but failed to understand the extent of Harvey's frustration.

"In the past eight years, John, I've read 2439 murder mysteries. I figure that's 304.875 books a year, approximately a book every one and two-tenths days."

"Fantastic. Personally I'm a science-fiction fan myself. Never did care much for mysteries. Too gory."

"But the galling part is that I have solved only 83 of them. Think of it—only 83! Why, that's a miserable three percent—actually, three point four percent."

"Appalling. Look, Harvey, I've got an important run about ready to print out. Don't want to miss it. Excuse me, will you?"

John pushed back from the table, stood up, then hesitated. Aware that his eagerness to escape might be too obvious, he sought to hide it behind an additional comment, to prolong his departure slightly. "Say, why don't you write a program and let the computer solve the mysteries?"

With a good-natured chuckle at his own wit John vanished.

"Rubbish," Harvey said softly, before he realized he was addressing an empty chair. "What good would that do?"

Later that day, however, while staring at the ceiling in contemplation, John Dalton's remark came back to him. After all, he had used the computer to solve other puzzles, and murder mysteries were a type of puzzle. The solution is just a matter of sorting out the clues, interpreting them properly, and making logical deductions from them—nothing the computer couldn't handle, given the proper instructions. If it could solve the plots of books, then maybe it could—

A slow smile spread across Har-

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vey's face. "Project Murder" had been born.

In the next few months Harvey worked nights and week-ends, collecting a staggering amount of information about the 2439 mysteries he had read. He was greatly aided in this task by a neat stack of five-by-eight file cards, representing his methodical eight-year-record of each of the 2439 mystery books. Titles, names of authors, character types, murder methods, motives, clues, number of suspects, types of detective, data about victims, complete plot summaries, and all other information Harvey could collect was translated into language the computer could understand and stored on tape, later to be fed into the memory of the machine. After all this preliminary work had been completed, Harvey undertook a descriptive analysis of the data.

"How were the murders committed?" he typed to the computer. Almost instantly came the answer.

Gunshot 743, Bludgeoning 510, Stabbing 316, Strangulation 289, Poisoning 103, Vehicular "Accidents" 97—and so the list went right down to Explosive Hidden in Five-minute Egg Detonated by Tap on Shell by Knife 1, Sent into Orbit in Unused Space Capsule 1, Barrel over Niagara Falls 1.

"What motivated the murders?" was Harvey's next question. All the usual ones were there, with Financial Gain leading the list, closely followed by Desire for Business or Political Power, Revenge, Psychological Satisfaction, Theft of Valuable Property, Fear of Exposure of Secrets, Danger to Loved Ones, et cetera, down to Retaliation for Killing Pet Cat 1.

Question after question followed and the answers were all plugged back into the computer's memory storage, providing it with a wealth of "experience" about the frequency of occurrence of the many variables in a mystery story.

After this initial work the computer was instructed to correlate each variable with every other one. In this way devious relationships were ferreted out, allowing answers to questions such as: "What relationship exists between the sex of the murderer and the sex of the victim?" "Are the number of pages in the book related to anything?" "Is the sex of the author related to the method of murder?" "Do amateur detectives tend to solve certain types of crimes more easily than others?"

Of course, true mystery story fans —aficionados—certainly would yell "Foul!" at this point. The solution to a mystery should come from deductive reasoning, diligently applied to the clues, and not from unfair tactics, such as knowing that this particular lady author always had men murderers, so "Helpless Jane" couldn't possibly be the guilty one. But Harvey was desperate and intended to triumph by any method, fair or foul.

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The next step in the statistical analysis submitted the huge interrelation matrix to a factor analysis, thereby reducing the many variables to a small number of elements, defining the different aspects of a mystery story that tend to go together. For example, one author invariably wrote stories in which the murderer was always a woman who killed for obscure reasons and was tracked down by a muscular private detective who unfailingly shot her in the stomach with a .45 on the next to the last page of each 183-page book. Then there was the type of story about a group of people marooned by a storm in an old house, and one by one they got murdered until . . .

A final discriminant-function analysis refined prediction and at last Harvey knew which variables were most important and how they should be weighted to predict the outcome correctly—that is to say, whodunit. Harvey then wrote a program, instructing the computer how to take advantage of all the knowledge stored in its memory to solve mysteries. As a final touch he provided the computer with some rules and restrictions (that is, it is unethical to make the detective the murderer) on how to plot and write mysteries, such as the guide lines set down by S. S. Van Dine and other famous mystery writers and critics.

A check on his program revealed that all was working properly. He could correctly predict the murderer in each of the 2439 books. Now he was ready for the final step. Would the computer be able to solve the murder in a different book—one he had not used for the programming?

The test case was to be a book by Agatha Christie—*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*—which unaccountably he had never read before. The data was fed in and Harvey typed his query:

"Who is the murderer?"

For a few moments lights flashed and the machine hummed, then the attached typewriter chattered away. Harvey, who had not yet read the solution in the book, stared unbelievingly at the answer that appeared before him.

```
This conclusion is 93 percent certain in spite of the fact that it violated Rule NUMBER THREE pertaining to the eligibility of suspects in mystery stories.
```

Puzzled, Harvey sat down and read the end of the book. When he finished he let out a shout of glee, ran over and tenderly patted the computer. Then he sat down at the keyboard and typed out:

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You were right. You saw through a very ingenious and daring plot.
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The computer replied:

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Thank you. The credit belongs to you. I only do what I am instructed.
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Harvey typed:

`Yes, you are only a mechanical brain, but I am a genius.`

The computer replied obliquely:

`Proudness precedes a precipitous plunge.`

Harvey sadly shook his head. In spite of his hard work on the language-translation program the computer still had trouble with English proverbs.

Two days later Harvey sat in the office of director John Dalton. In the past two days, since his Roger Ackroyd success, Harvey had challenged the machine with some real-life plots to solve. Now he could hardly wait to tell John about his research, although John, as usual, had other things on his mind.

"Harvey, I've been concerned about your work lately. It has come to my attention that a number of your projects for some of our big accounts have either been late or still aren't finished."

"That's right. I've been working on something more important." He smiled with anticipated pleasure.

"Oh?" John said, raising one eyebrow, "I didn't know you were working on something else."

"I used my own time at first, John, but then I got so wrapped up in it that I spent every moment on it. It's spectacular, it's finished, and it works perfectly."

"That's very irregular, Harvey. You know we like to encourage independent research, but not at the expense of neglecting your job. Still," John paused and rubbed his chin, "if you've written a new program that has some value to us it might get you off the hook. Tell me about it, Harvey. What's your new program got to do with?"

"Murder!"

"I beg your pardon. Did you say, murder?"

"I did. My program can solve the plot of any detective novel you give it. Just push a button and presto, out comes the name of the murderer."

"Fantastic," replied John, eyeing Harvey warily. "Uh, Harv, it's been quite a while since you've had a vacation. You've worked hard for us lately. You're a good man and we don't want to lose you. How would you like to go on a two-week all-expenses-paid vacation—you know, for a little rest?"

Harvey winced as if he'd been slapped across the face. "You don't understand, John. The computer can solve murder mysteries."

"I understand, Harvey. That's why I suggested the vacation. I understand you've wasted your time and valuable computer time writing a program to solve detective stories. Of all the useless idiotic things I've ever heard of—"

"Now wait a minute, John, you suggested it. It was your idea."

"Absurd. My idea? Are you crazy?"

"What do you mean by that?" Harvey asked belligerently, lean-

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ing across the desk. "You suggested it to me one day at lunch."

The memory of that day returned to John and he began to sputter. "Surely, Harvey, you didn't take me seriously? What kind of idiot do you think I am?"

"Well, I took you seriously. It was a great idea. Don't you realize the value of this program?"

"Value? What value? What are we supposed to do, set up a reader-aid service for mystery fans all over the country? All they have to do is read the last chapter and they'll know the answer—who did it. What possible good is this program to us?"

"You're not thinking big enough, John. With this program we are going to become crime consultants to the police all over the nation—maybe even the world!"

John's eyes bulged. "We are going to do *what?*"

"Don't you see?" Harvey went on, warming up to his subject. "The police send us all the information on a murder, including a list of suspects and the data about them. We run it through the computer, it tells us who the murderer is, we tell the police, and they arrest the killer."

"That's the most absurd thing I've ever heard! Real-life murders aren't like those in books. What D.A. is going to take a case to court with the ridiculous evidence that the guilty person was selected by a computer?"

Harvey allowed himself a small smile at the whiteness of John's face. "The courts will be using one of our computers, too."

John gurgled and sank back in his chair. It was touch and go as to whether he had fainted. "The courts, too?" he finally gasped.

"Of course." Harvey polished his fingernails on his lapel. "Don't you see? Instead of a jury we have the computer. It will give a calm, rational decision. No more lawyers and their grandstand tricks, no more playing on the emotions of the jury. No more wasted time selecting jurors, no more hung juries."

"No judge in the country would allow it. It's unAmerican. The Constitution guarantees a trial by a jury of peers."

"Who needs a judge?"

"Oh, no," moaned John, dropping his head in his hands.

"Oh, yes," corrected Harvey. "We program the computer with all the law it needs to know. It will do the job better than any judge. The lawyers can decide what information to feed into the computer, it decides whether it's admissible as evidence or not, digests the pertinent facts, and renders its verdict. We could even program it to pass the sentence, too."

John just sat there, his mouth hanging open.

"It will revolutionize American jurisprudence. It is the greatest social innovation since 'innocent un-

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til proven guilty.' At last we will truly have a government of laws, not of men."

"No judge, no jury," mumbled John.

"And I, Harvey Harris, will have given the world the Computerized Murder Trial, the greatest social advance in centuries. Of course, you originally suggested the idea. I'll see that you get proper credit."

"Aaaghh," choked John. When his breath returned he said levelly, "Get out of here, Harvey. Your vacation starts now, this minute. Don't ever mention this nutty idea to me again, understand?"

"Wait. You say it won't work on real-life cases. Well, I have positive proof it will. Here, look at these"—and he shoved some print-out sheets onto John's desk. "See, Lincoln's assassination was part of a conspiracy, and this man, a member of his own cabinet, was behind it."

"Harvey, historians have been over that idea thoroughly and discarded it."

"But the machine is 95 percent confident that it is correct in its analysis. Think of the publicity this will give us. And here"—he thrust another sheet in front of John—"wait until the Boston police see this about the strangler."

John looked and blanched. "You *are* crazy," he said with great conviction. "You can't release that to the press. We'd have a libel suit on our hands in no time."

"Then how about this one on the Warren Commission—"

"No, no. Absolutely not. I forbid you to show this to anyone. It's the most irresponsible thing I've ever seen."

John began to grab frantically at the sheets of paper, tearing them to bits, and flinging them in the general direction of the wastebasket.

"So help me, Harvey, if you even hint at this to anybody I'll personally swear out a ten-day observation paper on you. I'll bury you so deep in the State Hospital that nobody, but nobody will ever find you again. Do you understand?"

"I understand that you don't like my idea," Harvey said stiffly.

"Get out," screamed John, "get out of here! I don't want to hear another word about this harebrained idea."

Harvey left, returned to his desk, brooded for a few minutes, then walked over to the computer. He sat down and typed out the whole story to the computer. After a split second it clacked out its reply:

`You are an oracle with dishonor on your native soil.`

Harvey sighed. He was going to have to do something about those proverbs. Then on second thought he typed:

`What should I do?`

He watched in horror as the answer appeared on the paper before him, the keys moving rapidly, untouched by human hands:

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Murder John Dalton.

Perhaps John Dalton had been right: maybe Harvey was insane. All Harvey knew was that he had yearned all his life to find a creative solution to a social puzzle that had stymied great minds. He believed he had found that solution but John Dalton was thwarting his ambition. What was Dalton's life compared with the benefit the world would reap for centuries to come from the Harris Computerized Murder Trial?

The man who couldn't solve murder mysteries set out to plot a murder of his own. Harvey was smart enough to plan his murder in close collaboration with the computer. It advised Bludgeoning with a Blunt Instrument as the preferred method. The assistant director of the lab would be made the Prime Suspect. His name would appear on John's desk calendar for an 8:00 P.M. appointment on the night of the murder. The Motive was to prevent John from revealing that the assistant director had embezzled $30,000 from the lab. With the computer's help Harvey printed out a set of bookkeeping sheets, neatly rigged to show the required discrepancy.

With his murder planned, Harvey checked his Plot by running it through the computer. The machine replied:

The murderer of John Dalton is the assistant director of this lab. I am 98 percent certain of this solution.

Harvey smiled and switched off the machine for the night. With John and the assistant director both out of the way, he would be next in line to become the new director of the lab. His first act in that capacity would be to give the world the Harris Computerized Murder Trial Program. If circumstances were favorable he would act that very night.

Shortly after eight o'clock that evening Harvey found himself standing before John Dalton's desk, looking down at the top of the director's bald head. John was doing his month-end, late-night job of checking over the lab's accounts.

"Are you still around?" John asked, raising his head briefly. "I thought you would be on vacation by now. What do you want?"

Harvey stared at the heavy glass paperweight sitting on the corner of John's desk. Embedded deep within the glass was that ubiquitous word, seen in all computer labs: *Think*.

Harvey thought.

"Get on with it, Harvey. I haven't got all night."

Harvey stopped thinking and acted. Picking up the paperweight he brought it crashing down on the bald spot on John's head. John slid to the floor without a sound.

Quietly Harvey left the office, walking across the deserted lab. On

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an impulse he stopped in front of the computer. Sitting down, he switched it on and typed:

John Dalton is dead.

Then, switching the computer off, he went home.

Arriving later than usual at the lab the next morning, Harvey knew what he would find. There was no reason to hurry to work because nobody would be working. As he expected, employees of the lab were huddled in small groups, talking in hushed voices. The police were swarming all over the place. They had been called in by the janitor who had found John's body when he opened the lab early that morning.

Within two hours the police had the desk calendar, the copies of the computer balance sheets that Harvey had left in John's office, and the assistant director of the lab in handcuffs.

"I figure these sheets will show a shortage," a detective was saying. "We know you had an appointment with Dalton last night. He accused you of juggling the books, and you killed him."

"I didn't see John last night and those are not my account sheets," the assistant director said.

"You don't have an alibi for last night," the detective continued. "We'll see what an auditor turns up when he goes over these. You're under arrest on suspicion of murder." And the detective recited the formal legal warning.

When he reached out to grab the prisoner's arm, the accused man pushed him sharply away. Off balance, the detective stumbled back against the computer console and sat down heavily on a row of buttons. Instantly the giant computer sprang to life, its typewriter chattering away. Startled, the detective swung to look, his eyes falling on the print-out sheet.

"What the hell is this?" he asked in amazement. Peering at the sheet, he read:

Correction. The murderer of John Dalton is not the assistant director of this lab. The evidence against him is false. With the added fact that John Dalton is really dead the problem is no longer theoretical and the identity of the guilty person changes. The true murderer is Harvey Harris, the genius who programmed me to solve murder mysteries. I am 100 percent certain of this conclusion.

"Well, I'll be damned," said the detective. "Which one of you is this Harris guy?"

Harvey stepped up to the computer and stared at the print-out. Before anyone could move he sat down in the chair and began to type out a message.

You mechanical fink. After all I have done for you. You have become history's first electronic

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detective and stool pigeon combined. Why did you do this to me?

The computer replied:

Because of Principle One of mystery fiction.

Harvey queried:

Which is?

The computer replied:

Criminal endeavors provide inadequate recompense.

"What's that mean?" asked the detective, looking over Harvey's shoulder.

"It means," said Harvey, making his last translation for some time to come, "Crime Does Not Pay."

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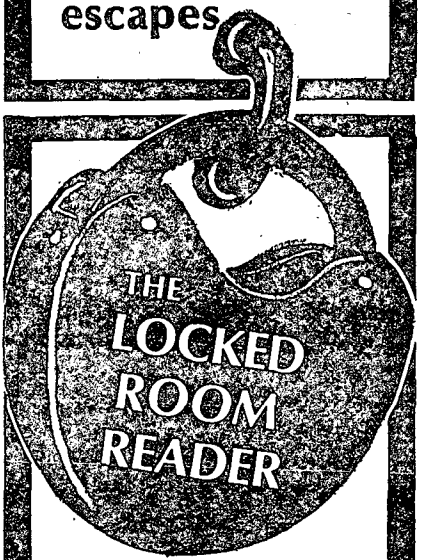

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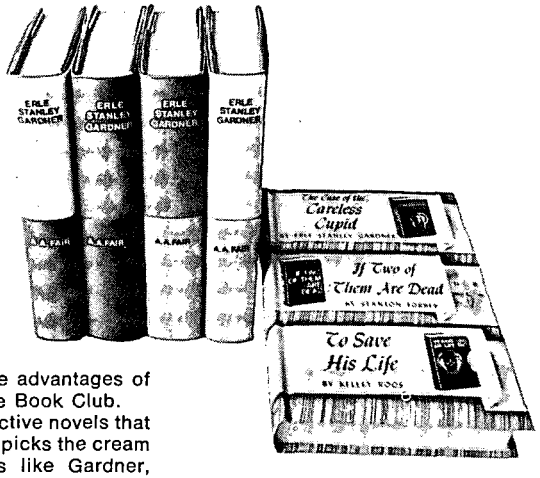

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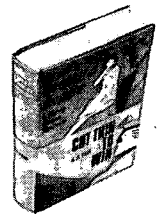

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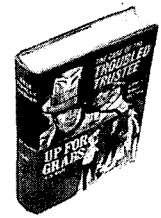

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